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Achaemenid Persia: Images and Memory at Rome (205 BCE – 115CE)

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Abstract

This thesis explores the Roman perception of Achaemenid Persia. It investigates how they came in contact with the Greek cultural memory of the Persian East, how they acquired and reused it and, in the process, they created their own original memories of Persia.

The work focusses on three instances of appropriation and the context within which they occur in order to understand by what forces they were prompted. First, it shows how the clash with Mithridates, territorial expansion and internal rivalry in the Late Republic promote the creation of a complex image of Persia as a symbol of triumph and victory over external enemies and internal political adversaries. Then, it sets the appropriation of the Athenian memory of the Persian Wars within the context of the transformation of the Republic into the principate and the subtle ideological and political manoeuvring that accompanied it. Finally, it argues that in a new Roman world in which the power is transferred from the aristocracy to the *princeps*, Persia, or, more precisely, the Persian kings, becomes a point of interest providing opportunities for those interested in exploring the idea of autocracy. The Persian ruler becomes a yardstick against which to gauge the tyranny of the emperor and, as such, he is used by Seneca the Younger to build figure of archetypical despot: the emperor Gaius. The dissertation contends that the Roman reworking of Persian memories produced a a new perception of Persia which closely reflects the evolution of the power dynamic of Roman policy.

Declaration of authorship.

‘Declaration: I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.’

Mauro Serena

INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores a relatively neglected aspect of Classical Studies – the Roman perception of Persia – and tries to investigate its evolution taking political, cultural and social events into account. The aim of this work is not to report what the Romans inherited from Persia (this can be quickly summarized) or to describe how they perceived her, but to investigate how 'the ideas and associations revolving around Persia' were appropriated in the context of the Late Roman Republic and the Early Empire, for what socio-cultural or political reasons and how these ideas changed over time in relation to the cultural, social and political evolution of the Roman world. Since the centre of interest will essentially be the interaction between culture and politics, especially in literature and historiography, this work will focus on the small circle of the educated elite.

The Romans certainly had an interest in Ancient Persia and the number of references alone is sufficient evidence. The most peculiar characteristic of this interest, however, derives from the fact that since they had no direct experience of her, much of what they knew about the Achaemenids they had learned it from the Greeks.[1] The study of the Roman debt to Greece has a long story but, as far as Achaemenid Persia is concerned, has focused almost exclusively on two aspects: the Roman reuse of the Persian Wars as a way to align their ethos and values to that of the Athenian past and the rhetorical representation of the 'other' as the barbarian enemy (the Persians in general)

[1] There is no need of direct experience in order to create a cultural icon. One may think of Alexander the Great or the Trojans. On the assimilation of the Greek element: Wardman 1976: 74-134 and Dionisotti 1988.

and as the quintessential tyrant (the Persian king).[2] It is not my purpose to outright challenge this, but rather to highlight that the Persian Wars and stereotypes connected to barbarism do not exhaust the subject by any means.

A host of questions will be addressed. Two are descriptive. What was the relationship between the 'Roman' Achaemenid and the Greek model? More broadly, what kind of interest did the Romans have in Persia? Three are interpretative. Why did (some) Romans find it important to adopt, adapt and, possibly, re-invent this Greek tradition? Did the Roman add their own original contribution to the Greek model? If so, of what did it consist? And with what purpose?

The work will show that the Romans did not passively import the Greek perception of Persia just as they did not import passively Greek history or political theory; that they took from the Greeks what they (the Romans) found expedient and as they (the Romans) understood it; that the Greeks are not the only factor to be considered in this equation. It will provide evidence that the adoption of Persian themes was a cultural appropriation resulting from a complex series of historical, ideological and political reasons. These very specific reasons prompted, on the one hand, the adoption of the Greek tradition and, on the other, the addition of something original, namely a new context: the story (stories) and stereotypes may not change dramatically, but their meaning is radically transformed. More broadly, this study will show that the Romans did not elaborate a coherent image of Achaemenid Persia nor did they have any ethnological or historical interest in it; yet, they (at least the elite) were perfectly conscious of the importance of foreign cultural and historical traditions and ready to adopt and adapt

[2] On the Romans and the Persian Wars, see Spawforth 1994, Hardie 2007, Schneider 2007. On the tyrant see Rosivach 1984, Bridges 2015: 157-90. The tyrant is an aspect that becomes relevant only after Augustus' *principat*e.

them for their own purposes. In addition, it will show that the way in which the Romans interacted with other cultures and peoples cannot be reduced to simple categories (such as imitation, admiration, supposed complex of inferiority, etc.). Finally, it will argue that the importance of Parthia in defining the concept of Ancient Persia should be revised.

The following chapters will, therefore, investigate how the Romans reused the materials they 'borrowed' from the Greeks for their own purposes and combined them with their own experience of the East (barbarian and Hellenistic) and other cultural phenomena in a peculiar way and how, in the process, they created their own original depiction(s) of Persia.

1. Theoretical background and methodology. Persianism, appropriation and cultural memory.

The aim of this work as expressed above intentionally paraphrases the definition given recently by Rolf Strootman and Miguel J. Versluys to a specific aspect of the legacy of Persia that they called Persianism, which is worth quoting in its entirety:

> 'the *ideas and associations revolving around Persia and appropriated in specific contexts for specific (socio-cultural or political)* reasons we propose to call *Persianism'*.[3]

[3] Strootman and Versluys 2017: 9 (= Versluys 2017: 215), italics as in the original.

Strootman's and Versluys' work is fundamental for several reasons. On a general level, they try to move beyond 'the East-West dichotomy that still characterises Western politics and social imagination, as well as much modern scholarship' a purpose that this dissertation shares entirely.[4] More specifically, they establish part of the theoretical background for this thesis. First, they make a clear distinction between two different phenomena: Persianism and Persianization which they define as 'the appropriation of a concept' and as 'an acculturation process' respectively.[5] Second, and this is the most crucial aspect, they single out two key concepts that lay at the core of Persianism and set it firmly at the intersection between Reception Studies and cultural memory studies: appropriation and context.

Appropriation

The purpose of Reception Studies is to 'map the interaction between the new text (or work) and its context and the source and its context'.[6] There are many ways to interact with the 'source'.[7] Among them Strootman and Versluys single out one: appropriation.[8] Lorna Hardwick defines it as 'taking an ancient image or text and using it to sanction subsequent ideas or practices (explicitly or implicitly)'.[9] There is a difference which can

[4] Strootman and Versluys 2017: 31.
[5] Strootman and Versluys 2017: 21. Persianization: 'cultural influence of Ancient Persia on other peoples and cultures resulting in the selective adoption of Persian cultural traits' (2017: 18).
[6] Hardwick 2003: 5. On Reception Studies fundamental is Jauss 1982. For a general introduction, still valid Holub 1984; on Reception Studies in Classics, see Hardwick 2003, Martindale 1993, Martindale and Thomas 2006.
[7] Hardwick (2003) identifies a number that are significant in antiquity (she calls them 'mechanism and channels'). She also identifies some 'cultural forces' (= 'intersections between values and cultural practices', 22) that shape the interaction between source and final work, which include *exempla, imitatio, aemulatio* and *paideia* (Hardwick 2003: 12-31).
[8] Acculturation, for example, is ruled out by Versylius and Strootman as the key component of Persianization.
[9] Hardwick 2003: 9.

be intuitively perceived between imitation, acculturation, translation and migration and appropriation. When compared to the other mechanisms of reception, appropriation requires an active reworking of the ideas and implies the highest level of interaction or cooperation between the agents involved. Strootman and Versluys choice is clearly not accidental and of great importance.[10]

Context

Context is the second crucial word. For Versluys and Strootman it is 'key' in shaping the peculiarity of each Persianism (of which there are many) and in giving to Persianism its 'remarkable strength'.[11] Context, which can be broadly defined as the framework within which a work / idea / culture is produced and within which the work / idea / culture is read, is a crucial concept for Reception Studies. Any source text is not stable but an ever-morphing entity, an 'event in time' and its meaning is the product of the interaction between the text(s) and the readers.[12] In other words, how the work is read (actualized) by the latter cannot be separated from the context he/she lives in.[13] But Strootman and

[10] They do not say so explicitly, neither they do define appropriation, nor do they discuss its character, but their position can be easily inferred from the context. On the importance of the '*active* role played by the receiver' as opposed to 'tradition' and 'heritage', cf. Martindale 2006: 11. For a clarification of what is intended by 'agents', see below note 13.

[11] Strootman and Versluys 2017: 9-10.

[12] Martindale 1993: 18.

[13] This concept rests on the idea that meaning, crucially, is considered to emerge from the context-dependent interaction between a polysemic text and an interpretative reader (Eco 1979, also Fiske 1987). Eco theorizes interpretation and reception as processes of meaning construction centred on the interaction between texts. In his view the text needs to be 'actualized' by the receiver (50) through a complex process, that he calls 'cooperazione testuale' or 'interpretativa', that emerges from the negotiation of mutual expectations between implied reader and author (Eco suggests that every text is full of blank spaces that the reader must fill because (*inter alia*) the author wants the reader to exert his interpretative faculty (52)). These approaches introduce new agents and multiple dynamics in the relationship sender-message-receiver, such as the concept of 'implied reader' and 'implied author', and the concept of the production and reproduction of meaning as a multi-layered, dynamic and mutually reinforcing cycle between the agents mentioned above, which confers a crucial role to context and the activity of the reader (or receiver).

Versluiys expand the concept even further and link it to memory studies. They note that 'at the heart of Persianism therefore is the concept of cultural memory – that is the construction of meaningful common knowledge of an historical period, often for political, or other socio-cultural purposes.'[14]

Memory studies

In memory studies, culture is the combination of 'shared knowledge' and 'shared memory' that are established and passed on, or, in other words, it is the collective memory of a group.[15] In the field of cultural reception, the culture of a group can be defined as context. It is the context (the collective memory of a group) that makes it possible to understand the meaning of an idea and it is the change of context (the transposition of an idea into a new collective memory) that may give an idea a new meaning. Here we see the proximity of Reception Studies and memory studies: context is essential to both because it is the interaction between the cultural memories (Hardwick's cultural forces) of the group that receives the knowledge, the source and the final work that produces the meaning. The close relationship between the two disciplines is even more apparent if we consider that every form of reception, by selecting and readapting ideas from other cultures, alters the organization of collective memory and modifies the manner in which memory is organized, recorded, circulated and transmitted, and creates new ideas. Since it is collective memory that generates

[14] Strootman and Versluys 2017: 17.
[15] Assmann 2016: 111-24.

collective identity, reception contributes to the creation of self-identity, the distinction between 'we' and 'them'.[16]

The fact that the mechanisms of interaction between knowledge and memories, a work and its source are analogous is hardly surprising because the creation of cultural memories is profoundly interconnected to communication. There is no collective memory without 'sharing' and the process of sharing is dependent on communication.[17] Appropriation, among the various ways in which the source can interact with the final work, is the one that requires the most active reception, implying, as it does, the integration of ideas within the cultural memory of the receiving culture and because it is 'through appropriation of a certain (imaginary) Persian past that cultural memories are created'.[18] Reception studies, communication theory, cultural memory and identity are interdependent concepts. This study, which has as object the investigation of the reception and elaboration of a cultural memory – the Greek cultural memory of Persia – its appropriation, re-use, and transformation into Roman cultural memory, will move within the parameters set by these definitions.

Methodology and approach

How can appropriation be detected? How is it possible to evaluate the resonance of a particular idea, myth or argument within a culture? How can we know if when a text (or work) reports or alludes to an event or a concept is reporting a personal interpretation, a general opinion or a deeply shared memory? There is no way to find an answer that is

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[16] Ethnic and collective identities depend on cultural memory, its organization and the interaction with foreign cultures. Barash (2016), Cubitt (2007).
[17] Assmann 2016: 119-24.
[18] Strootman and Versluys 2017: 9.

applicable to all cases. Taken individually and carefully contextualised, however, and, of course, allowing room for a good deal of subjectivity, texts can supply several clues. Recurrence and elaboration of a theme are good indicators. Reiteration suggests interest which in turn suggests popularity. A frequent occurrence of a point coupled with some in-depth development, suggests that the author put particular stock in it. If the elaboration of a theme recurs frequently in various works by several authors, it may be considered a trend. This, however, does not translate, ipso facto, in cultural acquisition; for, it is only when there is appropriation and re-contextualization of allochthonous ideas after the contact with a group with a different culture that new collective memory (culture) is created. Hence, a third, more helpful, indicator is the character of the interaction between ideas, especially those which define the nature of a group. It is evident that repeated concepts appearing in a meaningful interaction with the network of concepts that define a collective identity must be significant to the group who has adopted them. Of course, this is not a straightforward process, it is also not monolithic. The original ideas are modified, some members of a group may reject ideas that other embrace, individuals may change opinion, the same idea may be interpreted in contrasting ways, etc. But how ideas evolve and are modified and the reactions they prompt are meaningful indicators of cultural acquisition. Therefore, the main methodological tool adopted here to find appropriation is the careful reading of the sources in order to map the frequency of ideas revolving around Persia, and, more importantly, their alteration, adaptation and interactions with concepts defining Roman identity.

Once established that there is appropriation, the next step I take is to investigate what prompted the creation of these new memories and how Romans were influenced by them, or, in other words, how these concepts work in the new context.

The journey through the representations of Persia will deal with several themes and take the reader into the realm of rhetoric, political philosophy, power politics, geography, propaganda, historiography and identity. One of the difficulties inherent to such assortment of disciplines is the lack of homogeneity. A complication that could be minimised by adopting a thematic approach. Different approaches have different advantages, though. Authors who adopted a thematic approach produced enlightening works, however, by selectively focussing on individual themes or circumstances rather than the complex interaction between historical evolution and the evolution of ideas, they somewhat lost perspective of the process whereby the ideas are modified through their interaction with the context.[19] As I have argued earlier, context is the crucial factor in reception. Ideas in isolation are hollow, mechanical repetition is undistinguishable from acquisition and appropriation. If they are not set within a meaningful network of connections, there is no way to map how they interact, generate reception or cultural memories and what cultural influence they have.

Because cultural memories and identity are the result of the dynamic relationship between memories (created or acquired) and context, their acquisition and development is a historical process that unfolds in dynamic relationship (because memories are not stable but everchanging) with a historical context.[20] Hence, to ascertain how Persian memories were appropriated in Roman culture, their influence on the receiver, what

[19] See, for example, the works mentioned in note 2

[20] Assmann 2016: 50-69 (especially on cultural memory and history).

forces prompted this appropriation, and if there is any coherence in the Roman representations of Persia, the strategy chosen is to follow chronologically the unfolding of the events and to give great space to the understanding of the socio-political context while factoring in single events, biographies of individuals, the shifting balance of power, intellectual aspirations and idiosyncrasies. This narrative/chronological approach, because it allows more focus on interaction between context and ideas, is better suited to bring out the implications of their transformations and adaptations in all their complexity.

In short, I approach the reception of Persia as a whole in order to address how our sources participated in the invention of this cultural tradition. The methodological approach I adopt is interdisciplinary in that it combines a careful reading of key passages relating to Achaemenid Persia in literary and historiographical sources with the tools of reception and memory studies, and the material is organised along broad chronological lines.

2. Greek perceptions of Persia

As mentioned, knowledge of Achaemenid Persia was acquired through the mediation of the Greek experience. We, therefore, must make a step back and start from Greece. Rome had inherited the idea of civilization from the Greeks and the task of its transmission to others along with it.[21] Together with that of civilization they imported

[21] Cic. *QFr.* 1.1.27.
In the text and notes, references to the author's name may have been omitted when in the context of a section dedicated to the analysis of that specific author (e.g. *QFr* 1.1.27 rather than Cic. *QFr.* 1.1.27), except when this could create ambiguity. If not specified otherwise translations are from Loeb. Source of

the idea of its opposite, that is, the concept of barbarian. Although the Romans introduced significant variations, in general, the concept of being Roman does not differ radically from that of being Greek: it is a set of ideas, culture in the broad sense of education and shared values, to which to aspire.[22]

For the Greeks the Persians were barbarians, more precisely, barbarians per excellence.[23] This is a fact that cannot be disputed. But what is a barbarian? Aristotle notoriously defined them as slaves by nature and contrasted them to the Greeks who are free.[24] But Aristotle sits at the end of a long process through which the distinction between 'them' and 'us' was elaborated. I will try here to summarize the factors that brought this opposition to the fore. For the sake of simplicity, the process has been broken in three phases.

The first phase encompasses the emergence of the distinction. It is the process that Edith Hall has called the 'invention of the barbarian'. It is a phenomenon that eludes simplification, it is inextricably linked to the clash with Persia, but also to the justifications adduced by the Athenians for the creation of the Delian League and its transformation into an empire, to the increase in the number of slaves of foreign origin and to the development of Greek self-definition. However, as will become clear soon enough, the antithesis between Hellenes and Persians is not undisputable: the Greeks were obsessed,

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translation is always indicated at the first occurrence of a text. Latin and Greek quotations are from critic editions listed in bibliography.

[22] 'Civilization' imprecisely translates the idea of *humanitas.* On this complex concept, see Woolf 1998*:* 54-61.

[23] I use 'Greeks' and 'Romans' in a very loose manner. Given the complex nature of the relationship between local and national identities among the Hellenes, in a slightly tautological way, throughout this work, Greeks should be intended as an ethnic term, that is, as those who are not barbarians. 'Romans' defines educated Roman citizens, who identified, at least posed as if, with the *mores* as they were intended at the time of their life.

[24] *Politica* 1.1.5-7 (1252a-b), 1.2.5-21 (1254a-1255b), especially 1252a-b *ὡς ταὐτὸ φύσει βάρβαρον καὶ δοῦλον ὄν* 'implying that barbarian and slave are the same in nature'; Rackman, Loeb), also 3.9.3-10.2 (1285a-b), 7.6.1-2 (1327b).

and at the same time attracted, by the foreigners and the boundaries that separate the two concepts were crossed, repeatedly. This has led to divergence in opinions among modern scholars as to how this process came about and how much weight the polarization Persia-Greece, and more generally, East-West really had.

The successive evolution of the concept comprises the definition of oppositional identities. It is a process that cannot be separated from the efforts of the various poleis to place themselves in a hegemonic position in the Greek world between the end of the Peloponnesian War, the arrival of the Macedonians, the political transformations that came with it and the attempt of Athens to rebuild her maritime empire. It is probably during this phase that the Persians acquire the characteristics that will define them in the Greek mind as natural slaves, decadent and diametrically opposed to the Hellenes, or better, the Athenian idea of Hellenes, in short, the barbarians par excellence. Persian-related stereotypes in the manner in which they were defined by the mid fourth century and the tendency to use this 'us' versus 'them' antithesis in political context, will appear at Rome in the aftermath of her expansion in the East.

Finally, there is the impact of Alexander's conquest. It does not contribute significantly to the definition of Persia as barbarian and to the stereotypes connected to it, but brought about transformations that are essential to understand how Persian themes were absorbed in Roman culture.

The Fifth Century: Greek and Barbarians and the emergence of a distinction.

In its first appearances, the term barbarian (*βάρβαρος, βαρβαρικός*) was a linguistic notion.[25]

By the end of the sixth century, a distorted depiction of the foreign peoples and some stereotypes had already begun to emerge. Fictitious elements can be found alongside empirical knowledge and theoretical reflection in the ethnological and geographical texts produced by the Greek's contacts with the surrounding world.[26] In archaic poetry as well, the emergence of a contrast between Greeks and others is detectable; abusive expressions, exoticism and incomprehensible language are used to characterise the foreigner.[27] Although some of these ideas were destined to great success, still, 'the non-Greeks of archaic literature did not perform the central function of the barbarians in the fifth century and beyond, that of the anti-Greeks against whom Hellenic culture and character were defined'.[28]

When did the change happen? When did the Greeks begin conceptualising themselves in opposition to other groups? A very popular hypothesis identifies the turning point with the performance of the *Persae* in 472 BCE.[29] This reading was elaborated by E. Hall in her *Inventing the Barbarian*.[30] She suggests that the play represents the 'earliest testimony of the absolute polarization in Greek thought of Hellene and barbarian'.[31] This non-Greek element is pervasive, not only a 'touch', and

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[25] Hall 1989: 3-13.
[26] Nippel 1996, cf. Roller 2015: 32-55.
[27] Hall 1989: 18, Harrison 2002a: 3.
[28] Hall 1989: 51.
[29] Hall 1989: 56-63, Harrison 2002a: 3-4, Hornblower 1991: 11, Marincola 2011: 347, Isaac 2004: 260, Georges 1994: xv, Cartledge 1993 reissued 2002: 54, Nippel 1998, Hall 2002, Harrison 2000, Hartog 1998. For the authors who favour a later date for the development of the contrasting identities see *infra.*
[30] This is not the place for discussing Hall's work, I simply use it as a starting point and outline some of the considerations it prompted.
[31] Hall 1989: 57.

derives from a conscious choice on Aeschylus' part.[32] Since it comprises a representation of Asia by the European imagination, the *Persae*, therefore, constitutes the first example of Orientalism.[33] Besides linguistic and cultural differentiations, there is also a second component of the orientalisation of the barbarian (and of the Persians). By celebrating the victory of freedom over barbarism and despotism, the tragedy, proclaims the superiority of Greece and of her political organization. But, crucially, the way Persian despotism is conceptualized is specific: it is the opposite of democracy. And democracy means Athens. Persia has become the anti-Athens.[34]

This is how the antithesis comes about. Then, once the vocabulary to express the distinction has been elaborated, the rhetoric of barbarism becomes predominant in tragedy until it is turned upside-down and used to characterise Greek transgressors.[35]

This is an over-simplified summary of how Hall reconstructs the process whereby the essential ideological ingredients of the self-definition of the Greeks were created; but what about the content of these antitheses?[36] Broadly speaking, they belong to two main categories. Some are essentially moral, such as courage vs cowardice, or discipline vs luxury, other are political, or connected to politics, such as despotism vs democracy.

The picture is not so simple, however. It is evident that the polarity, as exposed above, is specifically Athenian. However, it seems that even in Athens the polarization

[32] 1989: 98.
[33] Hall 1989: 99.
[34] Hall 1989: 100. There seems to me to be a significant difference between this negative form of servitude and defining the Persia of Aeschylus – as Georges (1994: 96-102) does – a 'slave society' modelled on the Athenian 'household'. I would also disagree with the idea that after the *Persae* 'capricious cruelty towards those in their power becomes a leading element in the Persian stereotype.' There is little of this in the *Persae* and his parallels with Herodotus seem to miss the point (on Herodotus and Persian cruelty see *infra*).
[35] Hall 1989: 204, 207, 211-15. More examples of the inversion of roles and a slightly different approach in Said 2002 (see *infra*).
[36] Hall supplies us with a list. Hall 1989: 121-33.

was not monolithic. Extraordinary and memorable as the victories of Marathon and Salamis had been, they were not the only instances of contact between Persia and Athens. The Persians, for the Athenians, were more than an array of enemies on the battlefield. The cultural interaction between the two nations was complex, nuanced and sophisticated before and after the Persian Wars.[37] Second, the definition of the Persian as the 'other' in the *Persae* may not be so clear cut as Hall's analysis implies. On the one hand, it is not necessary to wait for Aeschylus' *Persae* to identify Persia as tyranny. In the Athenian mind, there was a strict connection between the two even before the Persian Wars, for, after the expulsion of the Pisistrades, being against democracy was tantamount to be pro-Persia.[38] On the other, the presence of the idea of ethnic opposition in the play has been questioned, for example, by Erich Gruen who not only affirms that 'Aeschylus decided not to relegate them [i.e. the Persians] to the category of the "Other"' but also goes as far as to say that Aeschylus never puts political systems (despotism vs democracy) in direct contrast and that even stereotypes such as effeminacy and luxury are absent from the tragedy.[39] And it cannot be excluded that when Euripides, in his tragedies, shows that boundaries are not unbridgeable and that the barbarian is now not so different from the Greek, he could be reflecting a 'crisis of Greek identity' rather than offering a conscious and intentional reversal of stereotypes.[40]

Not only is the relationship of Athens with Persia problematic, but when we look beyond Athens there are also issues. First, there are divergent opinions with respect to the absence of polarization in the archaic Greek world. Christopher Tuplin has argued

[37] Cf. Miller 1997, Ruberto 2009, Tuplin 1996: 133-77.
[38] Miller 1997: 4.
[39] Gruen 2011: 9-21, quote from page 21. Tuplin 1996: 169 finds little emphasis on Persian luxury in all Athenian texts from the fifth and fourth century.
[40] Said 2002: 95-100, slightly different Hall 1989: 222.

that tyranny and Persia were cognate concepts outside Attica, especially in the eastern poleis where the Persian had imposed tyrannies.[41] We may only speculate about the nature of the opposition, if there was any, in the many *Persika* written after 479 BCE.[42] This is even more regrettable because these authors were eastern Greeks and, unlike the Athenians, placed the history of Persia at the centre of their interest. And then, obviously, there is Herodotus. Some assumptions, such as Greek superiority or Persian cruelty, are often undercut in the *Historiae*.[43] Of course, nobody can deny that Herodotus acknowledges the importance of the Greek victory, distinguishes barbarians and Greeks according to their language and customs, or that he elaborates on the Greek ideas freedom and despotism from a Greek point of view.[44] If his attitude, however, is Greco-centric, Herodotus avoids excessive generalizations. He does not emphasise the cultural divide between the two enemies and the barbarians in the *Historiae* are depicted in a very nuanced way (often more nuanced than the Greeks), sometimes with negative, sometimes with neutral or positive connotations.[45]

Lastly, it should be noted, other cultural manifestations should be taken into account. In medical literature, the distinction is even more conspicuous than in tragedy and takes a rather less sophisticated form. The pseudo-Hippocratic treatise *Airs, Waters, Places* uses geographical and environmental differences to account for the diversities between the various *genoi* and then uses them to justify the superiority of free Greeks

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[41] Tuplin 1999: 54-57.
[42] Charon of Lampsachus, Dionysius of Miletos, Hellanicus of Lesbos. It seems that at least Hellanicus had discussed the luxury loving, effeminate Sardanapallus. Cf. Llewellyn-Jones and Robson 2010: 48-49.
[43] Gruen 2011: 21-52, specifically on cruelty: 33; cf. also the revision of Xerxes' brutality in Bridges 2015: 46-51.
[44] On the centrality of Greek representation and interpretation of non-Greek culture by Greeks and for a Greek audience in Herodotus see Hartog 1988: 212-59.
[45] Gruen 2011: 39. Cf. Isaac 2004: 263-83, on Herodotus, Euripides and Aeschylus: Harrison 2002b. There might be various reasons for that, a particularly significant one in Moles 1996.

over the slavish barbarians.[46] In visual representation, by contrast, the dichotomy is less systematic. Representations of Greeks and Persians on vases, artefacts that have elicited much interest, are characterised by net binary. Greek nudity, simplicity and *arethē* are juxtaposed with Persians' colourful outfits, luxury and softness to experess Hellenic superiority, sometimes with extreme crudity as in the Eurymedon vase.[47] And yet again the interpretation of these artefacts as the proof of a transformation in the image of the Persian after the victories of Salamis and Platea, has been challenged. Erich Gruen, discussing the Eurymedon Vase, the Boston Oinochoe and the Darius Crater, argues that a viewer can detect a sense of pride for the success against the invaders, emphasis on the succumbing of the enemy, who is identifiable for his clothing, beard and weapons (bow) in contrast to the Greek, nude, heroic and armed with the characteristic hoplite weapons, spear or shield, but no ethnic disparagement. He also notes that victories against Greeks are represented no less insultingly.[48]

In sum, Greek self-definition passed through tragedy and that there is a thin line that connects the representation of the barbarian from Aeschylus to Euripides and beyond. Then, in the second half of the fifth century, when democracy was established in Athens and the fear of the return of the Persians led to the creation the Athenian empire, the meaning of being Greek (or Athenian-Greek), in contrast to being barbarian, becomes an argument of discussion. It is in the context of this process that the basis for the evolution of a Greek conception of Persia are established.[49] Whether based on

[46] 16.1-5, 23.3-4. The date of the treatise is not certain. It is probably contemporary or slightly later than Herodotus (Jouanna 1996: 82). If Herodotus is one of the sources of Greek identity (Hall 1989: x) then why not medical literature? Cf. also Isaac 2004: 297 (defines it proto-racist).

[47] The points are briefly summarized in Hölscher 1992: 229-34, on the Eurymedon vase, see Lissarague 1996: 937-58 with bibliography.

[48] Gruen 2012: 40-50. Along the same lines Tuplin 1996: 176-77.

[49] Rhodes 2007: 35.

polarization or not, the distinction was there but it must have been quite fluid. When the Peloponnesian War opened the possibility that barbarian Persia could become an ally of one of the two contenders, both Sparta and Athens tried to get the enemy on their side and, if they could not, they were ready to negotiate with them to avoid their joining with the adversary. There is evidence of internal opposition to the dialogue with the Great King in Athens, but the fact that this possibility was pursued suggests that the ideological opposition was not so ingrained. [50]

Fourth Century. The establishment of oppositional identities.

When, after the end of the Peloponnesian War, Athens recovered self-confidence and renewed her imperial aspirations and Sparta established a controversial alliance with the Persian King, there was a radical change in the way Persia was perceived. The ambiguous relationship described above gave way to more defined image. Throughout the fourth century Persia would be depicted as 'the enemy', as a vulnerable state, vast, wealthy and rich in men but in a state of complete decadence, both morally and militarily. Its ruler would be a king who is a despot, surrounded by a court populated by women and eunuchs, enfeebled by a soft upbringing and presiding over a population that is formed of slaves. The Greeks, or better the democratic Athenians, would find in the social (fictional) organization of the Persians the explanation for their supposed decadence and support it with theories of geographical determinism or political evolution.

Fundamental for the development of this concept is the second decade of the fourth century. There is Ctesias' work, which dealt with the history of Persia in terms that

[50] Persia was a potential ally and a potential enemy at the same time. Among those who saw her as an enemy: Aristoph. *Knights* 478, *Peace* 105-08, 406-08, *Lys.* 1128-35, Gorgias *Olympic Speech* and *Funeral Speech* (in Philostratus *Vit. Sop.* 1.9.4-5).

are different from Herodotus.[51] But it is from Athens that, in swift succession, the crucial works that define the relationship between Greece and Persia will come. One example is the *Epitaphius* of Lysias.[52] In this speech, the orator summarises the wars the Athenians fought for the freedom of the Greeks and for the law, defines them as autochthonous and as those few but confident in their own fortitude, who stood, alone, against the Persian barbarian.[53] It is quite clear that the bravery of the Athenians is the consequence of their democratic institutions and of the pride and respect for their laws.[54] Their antagonist, by contrast, is a multitude fighting ‘for their own servitude’.[55] The glorification of the Athenians can partly be explained by the genre to which this speech belongs. The rewriting of history, Athenocentrism and the praise of the heroic feats of the citizens of the past characterise all funeral orations.[56] It is certainly not a coincidence, then, that the same ideas can be found in Plato’s *Menexenus.*[57] In the funeral oration that constitutes the central part of the dialogue, Greekness is assimilated to freedom. The Athenians ‘have’ it to the greater degree because they are unmixed and egalitarian. At the opposite end of the spectrum there is Persia, the enslaver of Europe, wealthy, rich in men and ships, the prototype of the barbarian.[58] The other Greeks seem to sit

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[51] On Ctesias scholars divide. Some consider him unreliable and gossipy (Briant 2002: 265, Sancisi-Weedenburg 1987: 43-44). Other are prudent but overall more positive (Stronk 2010: 29-37, 54, Lenfant 2004: CXXXVI, Llewellyn-Jones and Robson 2010: 22-36).
[52] Written probably during the Corinthian War (392-386 BCE), perhaps in 386. On Athenian Funeral Orations in general, see Loraux 1986 (with long sections discussing Lysisa’s and Plato’s works). On dating, see Tsitsidris 1998: 41-52. On the *Epitaphius,* see Todd 2007: 149-46.
[53] Freedom and law: 7-10, 18, autochthonous: 17, 21, alone against Persia: 24-25, 32-43.
[54] 18.
[55] 20, 23, 24, 32, 36, 41.
[56] Loraux 1986: 132-71.
[57] Pappas and Zelcer (2015) touch upon several issues relating to the dialogue.
[58] 239d *Πέρσας … δουλουμένους τὴν Εὐρώπην* ‘The Persians … were enslaving Europe’
240d *ἀλλὰ πᾶν πλῆθος καὶ πᾶς πλοῦτος ἀρετῇ ὑπείκει* ‘Since there is no multitude of men or money but courage conquers it’ (Bury, Loeb). It must be noted, Persia is never presented as in decay, her peculiarity is wealth and, more importantly, the staggering number of men and ships that can mobilize (on this see also *Laws* 698b7-c3).

somewhere in between.[59] It is not only geographical determinism that makes the difference.[60] The Athenians are 'good men' as the result of the nobility of their birth and upbringing, the combination of which brought about their political system (a good constitution) whereby the multitude are equals and the best rule on account of their virtue and wisdom. In other words, Hellenic identity is inextricably linked to the pre-eminence of Athens and democracy within her.[61] These virtuous men – the passage concludes – who embody Greekness to the greatest degree, will defeat the power of Persia.

These works are among the first texts to explicitly conceptualize the triumph of Athens over Persia as the product of her nobility, education and autochthonous origin and to praise her for defending the freedom (intended both as democracy and as absence of a foreign ruler) of Greece. The elaboration of the opposition between Athenians and Persians and corresponding political systems is presented in terms which are explicit as never before.[62]

Plato will return to the opposition between Athenian democracy and Persian autocracy in a later work. In an often-quoted passage of the *Laws*, the Athenian (the protagonist of the dialogue) explains that the Persians become subjects to a process of decadence from the original freedom under Cyrus the Great (freedom of speech, liberty and friendship) to servitude and despotism in the time of Xerxes and successive rulers. The crucial factor in this process, the Athenian explains, is upbringing. To buttress his

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[59] *Menexenus* 237b-246a, cf. Hall 2002: 219.

[60] Plato's position with respect to ethnicity is not clear-cut. Different positions seem to coexist in his writings as, for example, in the *Statesman* (262d-e), *Republic* (470b) (cf. Rowe 1995: 182 note d6) and in the *Menexenus*.

[61] Echoing, unsurprisingly, the funeral oration of Pericles who defines the uniqueness of Athens in Greece and affirms her cultural primacy: Greeks are not barbarians insofar as they are similar to Athens.

[62] On Athenian Funeral Orations, see Loreaux 1986.

argument, he exposes his version of Persian history. While Cyrus was busy campaigning, he handed his children over to the women and eunuchs to bring them up. As a consequence, they were 'fed on luxury and indulgence' and 'could not bear the idea of an equal'. That is why, when Cyrus died, his children killed each other and Cambyses could not live up to his father's example and went mad. Darius, a usurper, by contrast, had a traditional education, for this reason he introduced some equality in his legislation. But then his son Xerxes was given a royal education and after him it was all downhill. The final stage was an autocracy where the rulers did not have the good of the subjects as their priority and this eventually destroyed the spirit of cooperation and friendship in the state.[63] After concluding his revision of Persian history, the Athenian places the political system of Athens at the time of the Persian Wars under scrutiny. He identifies this period as the time before which people were encouraged towards 'total freedom' and chaos. At the hearth of the city there were respect for the laws and friendship towards one another. These virtues, and fear – according to the Athenian – were the factors that allowed the Athenians to prevail over the Persians.[64] It is worth noting that there is no mention of other participants in the war against Persia, neither Platea, nor Sparta. The gist of the passage is that a well governed state is the one that allows its citizens not to enjoy absolute freedom (democracy) or absolute slavery (tyranny) (freedom from foreign rule, and its opposite, ruling over a foreign people, is not an issue here – it is taken for granted that it is good) but only a moderate amount of them, and is capable to educate them in virtue. In this respect, Athens and Persia are coupled in their failure. The corollary

[63] 3.693c-698a. On the passage, see Hall 2002: 198-205.
[64] 698b-701c.

is that the Persians are not identified with natural born slaves, and even their form of government, monarchy, is not criticised tout-court.

It is quite likely that the *Oration of Aspasia* in the *Menexenus* should be interpreted as a critique and a parody of 'that apparently all-enticing tale of Marathon and Salamis as the triumph of city and citizens over empire, free men over kings and subjects, Greek over barbarian'.[65] Plato's own opinion about the matter may be better represented by the passage from the *Laws.* Still, the *Laws* reiterate the opposition freedom versus servitude, further elaborate on the idea of the importance of education as the determinant factor in the development of the state, build a theory of birth and death of empires to explain the (supposed) weakness of Persia (and the crisis of Athens), and imply the decadence of Persia.[66] If not the opposite of democratic Athens, the latest stage of the evolution of Persia corresponds to the opposite of Plato's ideal Greek city, manly, disciplined and just.[67] What these passages surely prove is that there was a revival and reinterpretation of the deeds of Athenian past and of her democratic constitution at the expense of the Persians. This review of the record of Athenian hegemony so well represented the mood of the Athenians that the funeral speech in the *Menexenus* was recited every year at Athens.[68]

Although different in genre, context and even attitudes, another text, written at some point between the *Menexenus* and the *Laws*, deals at length with Persian

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[65] Rowe 2007: 103. The *Menexenus* is a notoriously difficult text which has produced various and completely contrasting readings. See Loraux 1986: 263-327, Rowe 2007, Pappas and Zelcer 2015: 77-94, Todd 2007: 152-57. Parody seems to be the favorite interpretation. Either way it is not Plato's opinion that matters for the present argument, but what view of Persia can be extracted from his writings and whether it could reflect current ideas.
[66] Thucydides also makes a cultural distinction especially at 1.5-6. On Plato's passage, see Briant 2002: 193-95, less developed Isaac 2004: 291-98.
[67] Plato *Rep.* 4.427e 10-11.
[68] Cic. *Orat.* 44.151.

decadence: Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*. It is the fictional account of the upbringing of the Persian king, a man 'worth of wonder' (*θαυμάζω*), who, with a little army, managed to rule over a spectacular number of nations that had before been independent and detached and was willingly obeyed by them.[69] More precisely, it is so for the most part; in the last book Xenophon changes the tone and offers an image of Persian decadence consistent with what we have seen in Plato's *Laws*.[70] After Cyrus and a period of great success, Xenophon tells us, the Persians became morally inadequate (starting from the king) until they were unable to defend their own territory. This degeneration is the consequence of the softening of the education: the Persians learned quickly to appreciate comfort and became cowardly and weak.[71]

Possibly even more important (because it justifies the convictions that will be pervasive in Isocrates) are the points made in the *Anabasis* with respect to the size of Persia, her incalculable population, to her supposed weaknesses and the causes thereof. After remarking that Persia is strong because of her vast territory and number of inhabitants, Xenophon notes that this is also her weakness, because it makes communications and provisioning slow and forces are scattered throughout this wide territorial expanse.[72] Moreover, the empire is undermined by corruption and luxury, vices that he connects to the feminine element. They are presented as determinant factors in determining the superiority of the Greeks along with the latent disloyalty of the

[69] *Cyr.* 1.3-6.
[70] The main difficulty consists in reconciling the last book (8) with the previous ones. A summary of the themes in Isaac 2004*:* 291-92 and Gruen 2011: 59-60 (with notes 34, 35, and 38 for bibliography) who also offers his interpretation; see also Briant 2002: 195-96.
[71] *Cyr*. 8.8-27. In Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.15 *Ages.* 1.28 cf. Plut. *Cim.* 9.5, Xenophon says that the Persians have become white and flabby as women.
[72] *Anab.* 1.5.9.

satraps.[73] In short, Persia is big, numerous in men but weak, decadent and vulnerable.[74] It is of some relevance that, in addition and despite his philo-Laconian leanings, Xenophon betrays an Athenocentric perspective when he recalls the Persian Wars.[75]

The success of these reinterpretations is apparent in the most famous advocate of pan-Hellenism, who urged a campaign against Persia as an antidote against the particularism of the Greek cities. Isocrates reprises the concept exposed by Xenophon that Persia is vulnerable because it is vast.[76] As Xenophon, Isocrates considers the notion of unity (*Ὁμόνοια*) as key for the success and well-being of a nation (Persia for Xenophon – Greece for Isocrates). Similarly to Plato's *Menexenus,* and harking back to Pericles' funerary oration, in his view the unity of Hellenes concretises in the hegemony of Athens: 'those who are called Hellenes are those who share our culture (*παίδευσις*) rather than a common biological inheritance (*φύσις*)'.[77] With our culture, he means intelligence and speech, that is, rhetorical training, which, in turn, he identifies with Athenian institutions and culture. At the opposite pole of the democratic Athenians (Hellenes) are the Persians who are educated to be slaves.[78] The contrast is obvious and by placing emphasis on culture (rather than on ethnic considerations), Isocrates suggests that the reason for Persian inferiority lies in their social and political organization, namely because they are a monarchy, a political system that fosters servility.[79] If it lacks an ethnic component, the

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[73] Respectively: *Anabasis* 3.2.25 and 3.2.10-18; Xen. *Oec.* 4.11, *Cyr.* 8.6.1 and 8.2.11 with Hornblower (*CAH*2/9) 1994: 53-54.

[74] On the afterlife of this idea, cf., for example, Polybius 1.2. Critical to this reading, Hirsch 1985: 92-97.

[75] He presents them as an Athenian victory at 3.2.11-14, cf. Loraux 1986: 190-91.

[76] In *Paneg.* 145-149, *Philippus* 90 and *Letter* IX 11-14.

[77] *Paneg.* 50.

[78] *Paneg.* 150, also *Antid.* 293-294. On the relation between the *Panegyricus*, the Funeral Oration of Pericles, Athenian supremacy, and Isocrates' idea of rhetorical training as civic education see Poulokos 2004: 44-64. The discriminant is training in wisdom and speech (*Paneg.* 150, *Antid.* 294). On Isocrates' ideal form of government, the democracy of Miltiades, Clisthenes and Solon, cf. *Antid.* 306, *Areopagiticus* 15-35.

[79] *Paneg.* 151.

hostility is taken to a whole new level, is presented as natural consequence of the difference of culture between Greece and Persia and presupposes a bipolar world view, well exemplified by Isocrates' division of the world in Europe and Asia.[80]

Except for the differences in context, the themes are recurrent. They are identification of Greekness with Athenian pre-eminence in contrast with Persian barbarousness, Athenian superiority based on the supposed superiority of freedom in antithesis to the state of slavery of all the subjects of the Great King, degeneration of Persia due to faulty education and consequent softening physical and moral. It hardly needs saying that all these assumptions are wrong, or at least partially wrong. In reality, the subjects of the king were not slaves in any respect, the society was much more complex than some Greek writers tend to acknowledge, the satraps and local authorities had much more freedom than it is assumed and personal initiative of the satraps seem to have been normal and did not imply any form of disloyalty. It is important to note that, although inspired by the works of previous authors, the strong anti-Persian prejudice is an ingredient added in the fifth century.

The reasons for these misinterpretations are multiple. Sometimes they were born out of ignorance, sometimes, and this seems more often the case, out of rhetorical amplifications of stereotypes. But, it should be noted, they were prompted by political convenience and reflect contemporary historical and cultural circumstances.[81] For

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[80] 'So ingrained in our nature (*φύσις*) is our hostility to them' *Pan.* 158, cf. Plato *Alcib.* 120a. Division of the world: *Helen* 51, *Paneg.* 187, *Panath.* 47, *Philippus* 132. On Isocrates' position with respect to Persia and Asia in general cf. Briant 2002: 197-202. On Isocrates division of Europe and Asia, see de Romilly 1992. On the distinction barbarian – Greek becoming progressively more cultural and less ethnic: Said 2001, Hall 2002.

[81] The question asked by Momigliano (1975: 134) of 'why the severe but appreciative attitude towards the Persian Empire prevailing in the fifth-century yielded in the fourth century to a mixture of idealization of dead Persian kings and gossip about contemporary court intrigues?' may have a simple answer: Athenian politics.

example, as Pierre Briant has noted, Persian military inability was a rhetoric trope and should be interpreted within the context of the rivalry between Athens and Sparta.[82] The most evident manipulation of the relationship with Persia, however, is the rewriting of the role of Athens in the Persian Wars. It can be found not only in oratory and political writings (Plato, Lysias, Xenophon) but also in official documents and decrees,[83] and in the transformation of the concept of *medism*. *Medismos* was originally invented to define those who had agreed to give earth and water to the Great King during the invasions. Subsequently, it changed into a political concept. It was used to identify individuals who had crossed over to the enemy and are not Greek anymore, with the obvious consequent connotations of moral and cultural regress. Finally, the definition acquired an even broader meaning and could be applied to any form of relationship with anyone who could be perceived (or depicted) as 'not us', even within Greece.[84]

In conclusion, there is a progressive intensification of the antithesis between Greeks and barbarians. The idea of Persia developed first, during the Persian Wars; then, more significantly, in the course of the expansion of Athens' empire in the Aegean; finally, even more significantly, through a process of revisionism, inextricably linked to the development of Athenian politics, aiming at reviewing the record of Athenian hegemony. The rise and consolidation of democracy, the development of a Hellenic self-consciousness and of a pan-Hellenic identity are all phenomena inextricably linked to this

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[82] Briant 2002: 199-201. Contra: Hirsch 1985a, Hirsch 1985b: 61-100.

[83] See Robertson 1976: 2-24, Habicht 1961, Thomas 1989: 83-86, Hartog 1997: 975-81.

[84] Plut. *Ages.* 23.4 (*laconizein*). The list could be expanded further, see Loraux 1984: 98-131. On *medism* during the Persian Wars see Gillis 1979 and Graf 1984, Ruberto 2009: 159-75. The Athenian tradition was not the only one. Well into the fourth century, historians such as Theopompus and Ephorus may have offered a different reading of the polarity, presumably less Athenocentric (on this: Marincola 2007). A significant alternative to the Athenian perspective may have been preserved by Athenaeus (21.512a-b) who reports the opinion of the fourth-century philosopher Heraclides of Pontus on enjoyment of luxury and pleasures. He believes that all these features are peculiar to the Persians and the Medes and are compatible, even conducive to, nobility, freedom and bravery.

evolution. The outcome was the creation of a fictitious 'Persian identity' (barbarism) or, as Edith Hall calls it, an 'invented ethnocentric world'. This, in turn, was defined by antithesis to the Athenians' own self-image, the authority of which is thereby (for the Athenians) reinforced.[85] It may not seem too surprising that, in the years of Alexander's expedition to Asia, Aristotle would claim military and political superiority of the Greeks over the Asians and base it on the topos that eastern peoples are more prone to be dominated.

Alexander

Alexander, despite the ephemeral nature of his empire, left an enormous legacy. He led the united Greek polis to the conquest of Persia, avenged the invasions of Mardonius and Xerxes, brought Hellenic culture to the furthermost lands where only Dionysus and Hercules had reached, assimilated oriental customs, committed himself to despotism and the Greeks to monarchy and created a Greek world in Near East. With respect to the representation of Persia in Greek culture, however, the conquests of Alexander meant little. On the one hand, little can be said with certainty about his own position. His behaviour, if we can trust his biographers, seems to reflect an open attitude towards the Persians. Plutarch, for example, says that he refused to follow Aristotle's advice to consider the non-Greeks as plants and animals and distinguished by the criterion of vice and virtue.[86] The adoption of Persian customs, intermarriages, and the inclusion of Asian troops in the army suggests conciliation rather than opposition.[87] On the other hand, leaving Alexander's attitudes aside, with all the complications that they involve, it is

[85] Quote from Hall 1989: 8 and 222.
[86] (Plut *Mor.* 329b-d), cf. Strabo 1.4.9 [66-67].
[87] Whether premeditated or implemented under compulsion of necessity, cf. Bosworth 1980.

remarkable that the ideas revolving around the Achaemenid Empire in the sparse evidence of the period successive to the death of the Macedonian, are still the same that were prevalent in the fourth century. There is little interest in the contemporary evolution of the Iranian world, in the other areas of the former Persian Empire and in the emerging Parthia. Instead, we have the persistence of the myth of the decadence of Achaemenid Persia, while the example of Alexander could be read as the confirmation of the danger of *medism*.[88] Finally, there is the perpetuation of the memory of the Persian-Greek rivalry represented by the Persian Wars,[89] adapted to the circumstances and used sometimes against a rival king,[90] sometimes to place one or another ruler in the position of the protector of the Panhellenic values,[91] or to evoke a special connection between a Hellenistic monarch with Athens.[92]

3. **Parthia**

Parthia is the elephant in the room when it comes to discuss the Roman perception of Achaemenid Persia. The Arsacids defeated the descendants of the Macedonians and established an Empire which grew to control a vast area largely coinciding with the territorial expanse of the Achaemenid Empire. They were in control of commerce between the East and the West and built Parthia into a power counterbalancing Rome's hegemony in the West. Because of the Scythian origins of the Arsacids and their adoption

[88] Momigliano 1975: 137-38.
[89] The Persian Wars are 'common currency' in the 'early and middle Hellenistic period' (Priestly 2014: 158 and 162), then the importance of the theme seems to fade from the half of the second century BCE until the revival of the first three centuries of the Common Era (Almagor 2017: 327 text and n2).
[90] E.g. in Egypt: Agut-Labordère 2007.
[91] E.g. at Pergamum and Alexandria (Coarelli 2016: 158, Ferrary 1988: 562).
[92] E.g. the Galatian monument on the Acropolis (Coarelli 2016: 85-91).

of Iranian cultural traits on one hand, and the weight of the Greek education in Roman culture on the other, the struggle between these two ancient superpowers has sometimes been interpreted within the tradition of the clash between East and West which had its origin in the Persian Wars of the fifth century BCE. According to this interpretation, the Roman-Parthian conflict would have triggered associations with the Persian Wars. As a consequence, the Romans would have borrowed from the Greeks anti-Persian clichés, and transferred them to the Parthians.[93] It is my contention that the role of Parthia in the shaping of Roman responses to the memory of Achaemenid Persia has been largely overstated, in particular I suggest that, prior to 20 BCE, none of the encounters between Rome and Parthia evoked the memory of Achaemenid Persia directly or indirectly.

The memory of Achaemenid Persia and its relationship with the Parthian settlements of Augustus in 29 and 20 BCE is discussed in detail in chapter two. Here I briefly outline the history of Parthia and give an overview of her relationship with Rome. In particular, I discuss what was the perception of Carrhae, how it changed over time and if when, and how, it intersected with the memory of Achaemenid Persia.

The Parthians

The Parthians have left very little written sources and no account of their history.[94] Numismatics represent the most relevant Iranian source and provide invaluable – if sometimes difficult to interpret – information on king succession, regal ideology, ethnic

[93] See note 2 and 438.
[94] For many years there has been little interest in the Parthians and their culture which was considered peripheral or derivative. In recent years the perspective has changed, and a respectable amount of studies have been published on Parthian art, history, archaeology and geography. Hauser (2013) supplies a concise summary of recent research.

and religious identity.[95] In addition to coins, there are some ostraca from Nisa and Shahr-i Qumis and parchment from Avroman containing legal acts and documents; a few inscriptions and rock reliefs; and Chinese and Babylonian documents such as astronomical diaries.[96] There are also Greek and Aramaic administrative documents and inscriptions from inside the empire, and useful data from archaeological excavation.[97] These documents supply important first-hand information on a variety of topics. First, inscriptions (and texts written in the Parthian language shortly after the 224 BCE) show that the Parthians spoke an Iranian language, had their own system of writing and an important and original oral literature.[98] Second, administrative documents compared with Sasanian documents give us insight into Parthian class structure, the strict hierarchical order of the nobility and their organisation in families, the court, and the flexibility of the administrative system which very well adapted to the variety of political and social structures of the empire (self-governing poleis in the West and Mesopotamia, nomadic North-East, etc.).[99] Third, although it cannot be affirmed with certainty if they were Zoroastrian, evidence confirm that the Parthians had a keen interest in the old Iranian religious traditions, favoured religious syncretism and tolerance.[100] Fourth, important information on dress and weaponry are supplied by rock reliefs and

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[95] Part of the difficulty in interpreting numismatic and other types of evidence is due to the habit of all Parthian kings to adopt the throne name Arsaces. Comprehensive treatment of the whole coinage of Parthia in Sellwood 1980.
[96] Written sources on Parthia are collected and commented in Hackl, Jacobs and Weber 2010: western literary documents vol. 2: 1-434, documents from Middle East, Parthian and Chinese territories vol. 2: 435-639 and vol 3. Brief summary in Wiesehöfer 2001: 117-24.
[97] In particular the recent excavation of Nisa. For a brief overview, see Invernizzi 2007.
[98] Boyce 1983 (*CHI*3/2), overview of Manichean texts in Iranian languages in Sundermann 2009.
[99] Lukonin 1983 (*CHI*3/2): 700-40. Trade and the control of caravan routes was also extremely important. Information on this topic come from Greek and Roman sources and, indirectly, from caravan cities such as Palmyra and Dura Europos.
[100] Colpe (*CHI*3/2): 834. It is believed that the Parthian kings were Zoroastrian (Curtis 2007a: 422) but the issue has been argument of discussion for a long time (see Boyce 1968: 33n2).

sculptures.[101] Finally, archaeological findings place the Parthians within a complex network of cultural connections spanning form Central Asia to Macedonia, Thessaly and Greece.[102] Overall, these sources offer a picture of Parthia as a composite and multilingual empire, composed of a variety of ethnic groups with an original culture resulting from the original amalgamation of Hellenistic, Iranian and nomadic features.[103] They also confirm the peculiar character of the Arsacid political system: an empire constituted of semi-independent regional kingdoms ruled by a central dynastic monarchy.[104] However, for basic knowledge of facts and dates in Arsacid history and foreign politics, the modern historian has to turn to Greco-Roman literature, in particular to the works of Dio Cassius, Tacitus, and Trogus / Justin, with all the problems that their limited access to information and often inadequate understanding of social and political realities of the Parthian state brings about.[105]

The traditional year for the beginning of the Arsacid rule is 247 BCE. Around this date, a semi-nomadic tribe belonging to the ethnic group of the Dahae, the Parni, took control of Parthiene and, under a leader named Arsaces, obtained independence from Seleucid authority.[106] Their ambitions remained confined to the Caspian area until king

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[101] Kawami 2013 and 1987.
[102] Invernizzi 2007.
[103] Lerouge 2007: 19-20. Coin are a very good example of the syncretic ideology underpinning Parthian power. From the first issues to the end of the kingdom Parthians mints followed Hellenistic prototypes, kept the Seleucid weight standard and used Greek legends and epithets for the royal titles while introducing important iconographic variations such as the steppe dress of the archer on the reverse (a recurring theme from the first issue under Arsaces I), a bearded (Sellwood Types 11-13), long-haired royal portrait (Sellwood Type 30), the pearl-embroidered tiara (Sellwood type 28 and 29) and Iranian/Zoroastrian symbolism (Curtis 2007a: 414-26). See Sellwood 1983 (*CHI* 3/1), Sellwood 1980, Curtis 2007a and 2007b.
[104] Wiesehofer 1996: 57.
[105] To make matters worse, several important works on Parthia are lost: the *Partika* by Apollodorus of Artemita (very little is preserved in Strabo and Athenaeus), Arrian's *Partika* (only fragments), Isidorus' of Charax *Stathmœ Parthicœ* (very partially preserved).
[106] The origins of the Parthian dynasty are difficult to reconstruct, the ancient sources report at least six different traditions. On the issue, see Lerner 1999: 1-31. On the nomadic character of the Parthians there is no full agreement, see Hauser 2005 and Olbrycht 2003.

Mithridates I (171-138 BCE) transformed the state into an empire. Further expansion, mainly under Mithridates II (124/3-88/7 BCE) took the limits of the empire to the border with China in the East and to the Euphrates in the West. After Mithridates II's death, in 88/7 BCE, a period of disorder ensued, and little is known of the series of monarchs until Phraates III (69-57 BCE).[107] It was a few years after his death that the key event in Romano-Parthian relationships occurred: the Parthian victory at Carrhae in 53 BCE. The battle ushered in a long period of tensions between the two empires. However, despite some episodes of direct military confrontation in 40 and 36 BCE, and later under Nero, overall, hostilities were infrequent, and the competition focussed mostly on gaining influence in Armenia.[108] This precarious balance held until 113-117 CE, when the emperor Trajan led an expedition deeply into Mesopotamia. It was a great blow for the Parthians, and – at least from the perspective of the Romans – dispelled any ambiguities as to which empire was superior; however, the conquered lands were soon abandoned by Hadrian and the Arsacids recovered the lost territory. The end of the Parthian empire came about in 224 CE when the last Parthian king Artabanus IV was defeated and killed. By 230 CE, power over the lands that had made up the Parthian Empire was in king Ardashir's hands, the founder of the Sasanian dynasty. His rule opened a new, four-hundred-year-long chapter in the history of ancient Iran under the Sasanian dynasty.[109]

[107] See Mørkholm 1980 for an introduction to the issue.
[108] The events of 20 BCE, 2 CE, 11/12-18 CE, 58-63 CE, 113-117 CE, 161-163 CE were all triggered by a crisis in Armenia.
[109] Overview of Parthian history in Bivar (*CHI*3/1) 1983: 21-99.

Carrhae and the Achaemenids

The Parthians had been known by the Romans since the beginning of the first century BCE. At first, the relationship between the two states had been rather dull. After Sulla's meeting with an envoy of the Parthian king which had relatively little weight in Roman foreign policy, the years from 95 to 64 BCE appear to be of relative tranquillity and balance. Periodically, treatises were signed, and agreements found, whose content cannot be fully recovered, but it seems reasonable to believe that the terms stipulated did not change dramatically from one treaty to the other. The Parthians, for their part, seem to have been reluctant to get embroiled in the problems and quarrels of their neighbours and, insofar as the Romans did not push their arrogant attitude too far, they were happy to come to an agreement.[110] The Romans, on the other hand, seem to have been more aggressive but never to the point of triggering a conflict.[111] Phraates III's policy appears to be consistent with the tradition. His interests in Armenia put him in contact with the Romans but he avoided direct confrontation. In 57 BCE, he was eliminated by his sons, who then turned against each other. One of the two contestants, Mithridates IV, obtained Roman support from Aulus Gabinius, governor of Syria at the time.[112] Gabinius was ready to move East, but the expedition was aborted, before it had begun, when he was ordered by Pompey to go to Egypt to support the cause of Ptolemy Auletes.[113]

[110] Keaveney 1981. On the relationship between Parthia and Rome from Sulla to Crassus, see Lerouge 2007: 43-81, Sherwin-White 1984: 218-26, Sherwin-White (*CAH2/9*) 1994: 262-65. Dąbrowa 1983.
[111] Roman aggressiveness: Lerouge 2007: 48-63.
[112] Overtoom 2017: 418.
[113] On the complicated game of power going on at Rome at that point, see Wiseman (*CAH2/9*) 1994: 391-99.

This was the situation when Crassus reached the province of Syria. In the spring of 53 BCE, he crossed the Euphrates, attacked the smaller Parthian army from an unfavourable position, and was defeated.[114] Thousands of legionaries and auxiliary soldiers died, Crassus and his son were killed and their bodies perhaps defiled, ten thousand survivors were captured by the Parthians along with the Roman legionary standards.

It was a military disaster and it is unquestionable that it had an impact on the relationship Parthia-Rome, which from this moment became more tense. But the ancient sources present it also as a traumatic event with significant moral and psychological consequences. One only needs to read Lucan who, a century after the events, would write:

> gentibus inuisis Latium praebere cruorem
> cumque superba foret Babylon spolianda tropaeis
> Ausoniis umbraque erraret Crassus inulta
> bella geri placuit nullos habitura triumphos?

> 'While the ghost of Crassus still wandered unavenged, and it was your duty to rob proud Babylon of her trophies over Italy, did you choose to give to hated nations the spectacle of Roman bloodshed, and to wage wars that could win no triumphs?'[115]

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[114] On Crassus' expedition Sherwin-White 1984: 279-90. For a discussion of the reasons for the campaign and for the defeat, cf. Lerouge 2007: 81 and Wiseman (*CAH2/9*) 1994: 399-401.
[115] *BC* 1.9-12. Transl. J.D. Duff, Loeb.

and then:

ubi saeua

arma ducum dirimens miserando funere Crassus

Assyrias Latio maculauit sanguine Carrhas,

Parthica Romanos soluerunt damna furores.

plus illa uobis acie, quam creditis, actum est,

Arsacidae: bellum uictis ciuile dedistis

'Thus Crassus kept apart the eager combatants; but when he met his pitiable end and stained Syrian Carrhae with Roman blood, the loss inflicted by Parthia let loose the madness of Rome. By that battle the Parthians did more than they realise: they visited the vanquished with civil war'.[116]

For Lucan, the death of Crassus had sent Pompey and Caesar on a collision course, which would lead to a bloody civil war with far-reaching moral, political, social, religious and even geographical consequences; these would change the character and identity of Rome for good and divide the world in two parts, one inhabited by the Romans and the other, *aliter mundus*, by the Parthians.[117] From their remote position across the Euphrates, the hated enemies (the Parthians), would proudly watch and undeservedly enjoy the spectacle of the Romans killing each other. All this because the blood shaded at Carrhae and the shadow of Crassus had not been promptly avenged.[118] In short, in

[116] *BC* 1.103-108.
[117] Luc. *BC* 8.289-294.
[118] See 8.408-441.

Lucan's work Carrhae is the pivotal moment in Rome's recent history; the Parthians are the 'other', so remote that they are another world and 'the enemy' par excellence.

Lucan, however, is here buying into an idea that was elaborated well after the events. Dreadful as it might have been, there is no evidence that the battle was perceived as a traumatic event or as an episode of confrontation between the East and the West.[119] It is only in 44 BCE, almost a decade after the battle, when the project of an eastern campaign was resumed by Julius Caesar, that, for the first time, we read of the importance of exacting revenge for the defeat and for the death of Crassus.[120] Caesar's anti-Parthian propaganda did not take roots as it was cut short by his assassination. In fact, the republican party in 43 BCE could appeal to the Parthian king for military help. This suggests that in the perception of at least a relevant part of the Roman elite, the Parthians did not represent the quintessential foe. Similarly, in 36 BCE, it seems that the scar in Roman's psyche left by Carrhae must not have been particularly deep if Antony – who had inherited the idea of a war in the East – could not simply appeal to revenge in order to justify a war against Parthia and deemed necessary to reformulate the terms of the problem by requesting the return of the standards and the prisoners.[121] The process

[119] Cicero hardly mentions the fact and what we have of his correspondence for the period shows only concern for the internal problems of the Republic (*Fam*. 49 (II.5)). It would take him two more years and two Parthian raids in Syria (September 51 and June 50 BCE) before he, now governor of Cilicia, manifested his concern that the Parthians may invade his province, envisaged a possible threat and Pompey considered the possibility of waging a campaign in the East (*Att.* 5.9; *Fam*. 15.3, 15.1; *Att.* 5.18, 5.21 and 6.1). Carrhae was not the only problem, and not the most pressing one, that Rome had to face (in 53 the violent confrontation between Clodius' and Milo's gangs had dramatically escalated and between 53 and 52 Gallia was in turmoil). On the issue, see Timpe 1962 and Paratore 1966: 527-29, 533, also Caesar *BG* 5.24-58. On the Parthian side, it is of some significance that Orodes II's coins, among the most common, which suggest a period of economic prosperity and political stability, do not present any references to the victory of Carrhae (Sellwood 1983 (*CHI*3/1): 290).

[120] Dio Cass. 43.51.1, App. *BC* 2.110. Timpe (1962) has convincingly suggested that Carrhae was used by the Caesarian party for political ends, namely, to discredit the Republican generals (Pompey, Cassius and Sextus Pompey) who requested military support to the Parthian king. By making Parthia the greatest national enemy of Rome, the Republicans could be depicted as traitors and justify the cause of the opposing faction.

[121] App. *BC* 5.65, Plut. *Ant.* 37.2, Dio Cass. 49.24.5.

whereby Parthia became the enemy par excellence, and Carrhae a shorthand for it, therefore, must have started not before 45 BCE and evolved gradually until and after Philippi, well into the 30s of the first century BCE. Other considerations support this. It is only after Actium that, in literary sources, especially in the work of Horace, the issue acquires some of the urgency that we have perceived in Lucan's words.[122] Although several details, as, for example, the poets' precise motivations for such position, will remain argument for speculation, it is certainly in this period that Parthia became the enemy that must be defeated and that Carrhae started to be perceived not only as a military setback but also as a shameful event needing purification.[123] Further evidence of Augustan manipulation can also be found in the methodical soiling of Crassus' reputation in order to blame him for the defeat of 53 BCE.[124] Certainly, anti-Parthian zeal does not originate as a reaction to the defeat of Crassus at Carrhae, it is an ideological creation of the Caesarian faction further exploited by Octavian.[125]

In short, Carrhae was a dreadful event but it does not seem to have been perceived, in the immediate aftermath, as ideologically charged. There is little, if any, evidence that in the years between 53 and 29 BCE the enmity with Parthia may have

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[122] Lucan is clearly elaborating on Horatian themes.

[123] On the Augustan poets and the intentions of Augustus, are still of value the considerations of La Penna 1963: 76 and Griffin 1984. On the theme of purification see, for example, Propertius 3.4.9. In chapter two, I will examine Horace's position.

[124] Plutarch and Dio maintain that the senate and public opinion in Rome were against a Parthian campaign in 53 BCE (Dio 40. 12. 1, Plut. *Crass.* 16.2) and identify its main cause with the ambition of the triumvir (Dio 40. 12. 1, Plut *Crass.* 14.5). Then, they insist on Crassus' inadequacy (*Crass.* 17.8, 23.6 Dio 40.13.3), impiety (17.10, 18.5, 19.4-8, 23.1-2) and ignorance of the Parthian's strategies (Plut. *Crass.* 22.1 and *passim*, Dio 26.2, Appian *BC* 2.18. See also Dion. Hal. 2.6.4, Val. Max. 1.6.11, Florus 1.46.1-6. These two traditions soon merged, reinforcing each other and for later writers such as, for example, Pliny the Elder (*NH* 5.21.86)., Carrhae triggered images of Crassus' failure and Roman disgrace. On the rehabilitation of Crassus, Augustan sullying of his reputation and perception of Carrhae in imperial age, see Overtoom 2017, Traina 2010 and 2009, Arnaud 1998.

[125] The role of Augustus in creating the Parthian enemy is acknowledged by many: Shayegan 2011: 332-49, Sonnabend 1986: 200-21, Schneider 1986: 19-30 and 2007, Campbell 2002. Where I disagree is on the equation between Arsacids and Achaemenids and its consequent ideological identification of Rome with Greece.

been set within the idea of the clash between the East and the West, while the leitmotif of Crassus' impiety and the trope of Carrhae as the stain that must be cleaned off through revenge are an ideological creation elaborated in order to make the settlement of Augustus look as revenge of Crassus' defeat. If this is correct, it is therefore difficult to see how Carrhae could have played a role in shaping the Roman response to the memory of Achaemenid Persia before the Augustan Parthian settlements. No evidence can be presented to exclude that, at some point, the battle or some related episodes, or the perception of Parthia as an eastern enemy may have elicited comparison with episodes of the clash between Greece and Achaemenid Persia. But there is also hardly any proof of this before 20 BCE and, as it will be shown in chapter 2, very little after that date.

The Achaemenids that the Romans envisaged in the last years of the Republic were not the Parthians, nor were they the Persians of Isocrates and Plato. As we will see in chapter 1, they were the Achaemenids paraded by Pompey, which resonated of Alexander the Great, exoticism, and of the Mithridatic memory of Persia. Neither Carrhae nor the Persia paraded by Pompey in his triumph would bring about memories of the Persian Wars. After Carrhae and at least until 30 BCE, the Achaemenids and the Parthians were not assimilated in the Roman mind. It is significant that a connection in these terms does not appear until very late. It is only in Seneca that Xerxes and Alexander are explicitly placed on the same level to that of Crassus.[126]

[126] Sen. *Nat.* 5.18.9-10.

4. Summary of the thesis

Due to its fluidity, mapping the process of acquisition, integration and transformation just described defies any rigidly systematic approach and inferences rely heavily on personal interpretation. Yet, some themes and processes will appear very clearly.

The first chapter explores how, between the Second Punic War and the death of Julius Caesar, Persia entered Roman imagery. That is, how the idea of Persia was re-elaborated from Plautus' wishy-washy caricature of a barbarian to the exotic, wealthy, powerful … and yet still barbarian enemy of Pompey. The chapter begins by considering the *Bellum Antiochicum* and suggesting that whatever memories of Persia and the Persian Wars the conflict had awakened, they did not matter much for the Romans. Then it moves to the main topic to demonstrate that the image of Persia was very relevant during and after the Mithridatic Wars. It first analyses the figure of Mithridates and suggests that he had elaborated an ideology that was based on a skilful manipulation of the myth of Alexander and, for the first time, on the memory of Achaemenid Persia. Then, it argues that Sulla's and Lucullus' Asian policy, was (partially) a reaction to Mithridates' policy. The second half focusses on the rivalry between Pompey and Lucullus and argues that the attacks to the image of the latter were based, *inter alia*, on his acquisition of Persian features: a revised form of *medism*. The chapter concludes with Pompey's triumph, the final act of a long process through which the far East made his entrance right to the centre of Rome and, for the first time, offered to the Romans an image of Persia.

The second chapter analyses the three main contexts in which Persia appears in the Augustan period. They are the supposed revival of the Persian Wars in relation with

the Battle of Actium, the 'Parthian problem' and the interpretation of Rome's hegemony in universal terms (which places Persia in the role of a precedent for Rome and of Parthia in that of her contender). The main argument is that there is no solid case for a 'revival' of the Persian Wars at Rome before 20 BCE, in particular in relation to the Battle of Actium, and no solid case for any assimilation between Persian and Parthians even after that date. It is contended, instead, that allusions to the glorious deeds of the Greek past should be intended as a symptom of local revanchism, contrasted by Rome with a conscious appropriation and dilution of the myth of the Persian Wars. The chapter ends with an analysis of the re-writing of the past under Augustus and the promotion of a universal concept of history moving from the premises that by the time of the consolidation of Augustus' power, it had become very popular to place Rome in the most preeminent position at the end of a sequence of empires that started with Achaemenid Persia.

The third chapter investigates how, under the early emperors, the intellectuals interrogated history to understand their time. It suggests that the view of Persia from Seneca onwards is, for the most part, the result of his investigation of autocracy and tendentious presentation of some events. It explores how, in his works, the Persian king acquires very defined moral features, cruelty and arrogance in particular, which are then used to build an image of unrestrained tyrant. By constructing an image of the Persian king as the prototype of the bad ruler Seneca creates a negative model of ruler to use as a foil for a good ruler that he uses in his discourse on kingship. I then analyse some of the anecdotes relating to the emperor Gaius to point out how the Persian ruler is used to elaborate the image of the quintessential Roman tyrant. I briefly identify the

ramifications of these ideas in contemporary and successive authors and on the perception of the tyrannical emperors.

CHAPTER ONE.

FROM ANTIOCHUS TO POMPEY: CONQUERING THE EAST, CONFRONTING THE MEMORY OF PERSIA.

Everything the educated Romans knew about Persia they learned through the mediation of the Greeks, and especially the Athenians, who, in turn had elaborated their own very personal idea of her. It is therefore natural that the first question to address is when do these ideas begin to be appropriated (rather than, for example, simply transmitted) by the Romans. Is there any significant mention of Persia that can be related to the Greek precedent? And, if so, how does it relate to the context? In the following pages the appropriation of Persian Memories will be investigated in the context of the struggle for world power (imperial expansion) and internal political competition of the years 191-63 BCE. It will clearly emerge that the combination of these two elements plays a crucial role in shaping the appropriation of Persian memories.

Between 198 and 189 BCE, a monarch from the East, a king who has in his official titles 'Great King' and 'King of Babylon',[127] repeatedly crosses the Hellespont, pays a visit to Ilium where he sacrifices to Athena and then invades Greece with an army composed of oriental troops and fights at the Thermopylae.[128] When he is defeated, he flees to Asia 'without looking back'.[129] He was not the first one to do so. In 480 BCE the Persian King Xerxes, the Great King, honoured the goddess Athena and offered libations to the heroes

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[127] On Antiochus *megas*: Appian *Syr.* 1 [1]. Epigraphic documents are collected and discussed by Ma (1999: 272-73). On Antiochus as king of Babylon Sachs and Hunger 1989 n. 187 Rev. 11 with Pritchard 1969: 317, Kuhrt and Sherwin-White 1993: 133-34, 199-200, 216. Also, Sachs and Wiseman 1954: 206-11 and Del Monte 2001: 137–66.

[128] Hellespont: Livy 33.38.8, 35.23.10 and 35.48.3, Ilium: Livy 35.43.3, Thermopylae App. *Syr.* 17-20 [75-91]; Livy 36.19.11.

[129] App. *Syr.* 20 [91].

at Ilium, notoriously crossed the Hellespont leading a vast and exotic army and confronted the Greeks at the Thermopylae.[130]

These striking coincidences between the events of the *bellum Antiochicum* and the Persian Wars of 480 BCE raise the question of what role Persian memories play in the war against Antiochus III. Several historians have addressed the problem. Some suggest that the Romans 'created a counter-narrative in which they themselves became the liberators of Greece from Asian oppression'.[131] Others suggest that some Romans perceived Antiochus III as a new Persian king, more precisely, as a new Xerxes.[132] It is easier to agree with the first position than with the second.

One of the purposes of this study is to argue that the crucial moment for the reception of the Achaemenid past at Rome are the Mithridatic Wars which triggered a series of events that led to the awakening of the interest of the Roman public for Persian themes. This will be the object of sections 2-4; for now suffice to say that Persian memories were appropriated by the Romans only when they were incorporated in the political struggle between Lucullus and Pompey in the aftermaths of that conflict. In the following pages (section 1), therefore, I will show that a strong case for Roman Persianism during the *bellum Antiochicum* does not exist.

[130] Respectively: Hdt. 7.43, 8.55, 7.61-95, 201-233. The Greek title of the Persian King could vary from a precise translation from the Ancient Persian 'king of kings' [= ap. *xšāyaΘiya xšāyaΘiyānām*] as *βασιλῆς βασιλέως* (Aesch. *Pers.* 24), to a less accurate *βασιλεὺς ὁ μέγας* (Hdt. 1.188). Xerxes' adoption of the title 'King of Babylon' is now undisputed (Kuhrt and Sherwin-White 1987: 72-73).
[131] Strootman and Versluys 2017: 26.
[132] Vahlen 1928: CXCVIII, Skutsch 1985: 535, Moggi 1972: 40n162. Paratore 1966: 519; contra: Ball 2000: 10.

1. Antiochus as a new Xerxes.

When Antiochus moved to Greece upon the request of the Aetolians, he undoubtedly tried to offer an image congenial to the Greeks. He presented himself, and so was presented by his allies, as the liberator of Greece and as a new Alexander.[133] Thus, how are we to explain the many parallels with the Persian kings exposed above that make him like a new Xerxes or a Persian despot? Before we investigate the perception of Antiochus the Romans had, we may spend some time to understand whether he was labelled as Achaemenid by his Greek opponents.

Those who suggest that this is the case base their assertion on the consideration that the theme of the Persian Wars – and its cognate concept of East versus West – might have been reused by the Romans and their supporters to strengthen the cohesion of the anti-Antiochus coalition.[134] These are the elements on which this idea is based: First, a precedent in the Second Macedonian War, then: (a) A claim of the Rhodians to have sent – in 197 – an ultimatum to Antiochus patterned on the Peace of Callias; (b and c) A reading of two epigrams of Alcaeus of Messene according to which Antiochus would be compared to Xerxes and Flaminius to the anti-Xerxes; (d) a number of passages in Polybius; (e) the sacrifice at Ilium; (f) the 'Roman Passages' in the *Alexandra* of Lycophron. Finally, a number of passages from Livy in which the Seleucids are compared to the Persians, the most significant of which are: (g) a speech by an envoy of Antiochus

[133] Not only Antiochus presenting himself as a Persian king invading Greece to the Greeks does not make sense in propagandistic terms, but it has also been convincingly argued that he did not invoke any connection between himself, his dynasty and the Achaemenids or present himself as a new Persian in Asia at any time. Cf. Briant 1990: 46-47, 50-55, Austin 2003: 128.

[134] That Antiochus had tried to turn the tables on the Romans is possibly less strong an argument, although generally accepted.

presenting the army of Antiochus as if it were like that of Darius and Xerxes (i.e. huge); (h) considerations on the inferiority of Syrians and Asians; (i) the episode of the Thermopylae.[135]

Although it is not directly related to the central argument of this study it is worth taking the time to revise the documents because the weight of this evidence is relevant to the possible reverberation that the theme may have had at Rome (since it is connected to the Roman perception, the problems that derive from the Livyan passages will be addressed later). Although it seems overwhelming, I would suggest that this evidence is less solid than it appears.

A Greek perspective

The precedent of Philip V.

It has been suggested that both parties involved in the Second Macedonian War tried to exploit the great significance held by the Persian Wars in the cultural memory of the various Greek communities scattered across the Mediterranean in their propaganda.[136]

Polybius quite explicitly says that the alliance of the Romans and the Aetolians against Philip V stimulated a revival of Pan-Hellenism and the Romans were soon branded as barbarians by their opponents.[137] Unfortunately, he does not specify how this happened, nor he defines to what barbarians he refers to. Using some poems by Alcaeus of Messenia as starting point, Frank W. Walbank proposed a possible sequence of events.

[135] Livy 35.48, 36.17.5, 36.19.11 (g/h/I respectively). Here I follow, with some further additions, for the most part Mastrocinque 1977-78 (a,b,g-i) who has, to my knowledge, the most comprehensive discussion on the topic. There is now a concise overview of the issue in Russo 2018: 51-46.
[136] See section on Greece perception of Persia.
[137] Pol. 9.37.5-6, 9.39.1-5 and 18.45.6.

He suggests that this theme was possibly adopted by Macedonian propaganda to depict the Romans as a new invading force, not dissimilar from the Persians in 480 BCE. Subsequently, Flaminius would have employed the idea against its inventor.[138] The inference is based on idea that Alcaeus changed allegiance and became anti-Macedonian at some point between 201 and 197 BCE. This shift would therefore reflect the transformation in the policies among the Greek cities caused by the propaganda against Philip V sponsored by Flaminius. The introduction of Persia as a more precise term of comparison rests mainly on the interpretation of the epigram that sets Flaminius next to Xerxes.[139]

Ἄγαγε καὶ Ξέρξης Πέρσαν στρατὸν Ἑλλάδος ἐς γᾶν,

καὶ Τίτος εὐρείας ἄγαγ᾽ ἀπ᾽ Ἰταλίας·

ἀλλ᾽ ὁ μὲν Εὐρώπᾳ δοῦλον ζυγὸν αὐχένι θήσων

ἦλθεν, ὁ δ᾽ ἀμπαύσων Ἑλλάδα δουλοσύνας.

Ant. Pal. 16.5

Both Xerxes led a Persian host to the land of Hellas, and Titus, too, led there a host from broad Italy, but the one meant to set the yoke of slavery on the neck of Europe, the other to put an end to the servitude of Hellas. (Paton, Loeb)

[138] Walbank 1943: 9-10n8-9.
[139] Walbank 1943: 9-10n9, Thornton 2001: 196n81-82; Ferrary 1988: 86-87, Mastrocinque 1977-78: 13. Also: Primo 2009. Cf. Plut. *Flam.* 11-12. On Plutarch's very complex attitude towards Persia see Almagor 2017, Spawforth 1994: 245-46.

The epigram is irritatingly ambiguous.[140] First, because Xerxes is the paradigm for both the invader and the tyrant *par excellence*, all characters share a Xerxean aspect. Flaminius because he is an invader, Philip (if we include him) because he is a tyrant and an invader. Second, because, by recalling the Persian Wars and emphasising *δουλεία*, the poem reminds the reader of the difference between the present situation and the past. The freedom defended during the Persian Wars was a Greek success, not a *beneficium* granted from outside, as any reader of Isocrates would have known.[141] It is difficult to dispel the impression that the poem presents a comparison between the Persian king and the second century's invader(s) in which the latter come off worst. In fact, Xerxes never managed to enslave Greece, whereas now, Philip succeeded in doing so. And, even though Flaminius freed Hellas, he is still an invader and a successful one. Sure, the Persian Wars are recalled. What is less clear is who is appropriating them.

(a) The Rhodians

In the context of the struggle between Antiochus and Rome the first allusion to the Persian Wars appears to have been made by the Rhodians who claimed to have sent – in 197 – an ultimatum to Antiochus urging not to advance beyond the Chelidonian islands. Since this is the same place where the Persians had been halted by the peace of Callias, they could present themselves as the new Athenians who had stopped the progression of an oriental enemy.[142] The Rhodian assertion was, to say the least, an exaggeration. It

[140] Wallbank's hypothesis has not convinced everybody, cf. Edson 1948.
[141] Cf. *Pan.* 94-95.
[142] Livy 33.20.1-3.

is however meaningful that they intentionally manipulated the events to create this parallel. [143]

(b - c) Alcaeus of Messene.

It has been suggested that Alcaeus' poem mentioned before should be dated to 193 BCE and would allude to Antiochus III (rather than Philip V).[144] Building on this possibility it has been argued that another poem attributed to Alcaeus could also allude to Antiochus III as a new Xerxes through the figure of Marsia (*Ant. Pal.* 16.8).[145] However, that Alcaeus had also attacked Antiochus and that this was based on the parallel with Xerxes is an inference that rests primarily on the assumption that the first poem refers to Antiochus, on the conviction that Antiochus III positioned himself as the heir of the Achaemenids and on Florus. All these readings are very questionable and without these bolsters the Persian interpretation of the poem on Marsia is as good as any other, perhaps even less.[146]

(d) Polybius

Scattered throughout the surviving fragments of Polybius, there are several episodes in which Antiochus appears to act in a way that is reminiscent of Xerxes.[147] For example, in one case Antiochus weeps in a way that Brian McGing sees as reminiscent of Xerxes at

[143] Exaggeration: Rawlings 1976: 9-10 note 46: see also Grainger (2002: 41-43). On the parallel with the Peace of Callias: Grainger 2002: 42; cf. Ma 1999: 83.
[144] Kuijper 1972.
[145] Coppola 1998: 473-75. The defeat of Marsia by Apollo would allude to the defeat of Antiochus by the Romans. Because Marsia could be associated with Xerxes an implicit parallel would be suggested (Athens/Athena = Apollo/Rome versus Marsia/Xerxes/Antiochus).
[146] Kuijper's hypothesis remains isolated and even Coppola accepts it tentatively. On Antiochus and the Achaemenids, see note 120 on Florus, see *infra*.
[147] Passages identified and discussed by McGing 2010: 52-58.

the Bosphorus.[148] The truth is that all these associations are rather tenuous and, at best, we can say that they point more to perceived general attitudes of eastern royalties rather than to specific characters. This and other episodes can be much better explained if we consider that, rather than with Persian kings, Polybius seems to be interested in associating Antiochus with Hannibal and Philip, characters who dwell in the twilight zone between Hellenism and barbarism (somewhat like Alexander).[149] It may well also be possible that similarities are to some extent coincidental or not meant to convey any complex meaning; after all Herodotus is one of Polybius' models.

Another significant passage occurs in the twenty-first book, where Polybius describes the reaction to Antiochus' defeat of and the peace of Apamea. He says that the cities of Anatolia express gratitude to Rome for having freed them from the 'fear of the barbarians'.

> *ἅπαντες γὰρ οἱ τὴν ἐπὶ τάδε τοῦ Ταύρου κατοικοῦντες οὐχ οὕτως ἐχάρησαν Ἀντιόχου λειφθέντος ἐπὶ τῷ δοκεῖν ἀπολελύσθαι τινὲς μὲν φόρων, οἱ δὲ φρουρᾶς, καθόλου δὲ πάντες βασιλικῶν προσταγμάτων, ὡς ἐπὶ τῷ τὸν ἀπὸ τῶν βαρβάρων αὑτοῖς φόρον ἀφῃρῆσθαι καὶ δοκεῖν ἀπηλλάχθαι τῆς τούτων ὕβρεως καὶ παρανομίας.*
>
> Pol. 21.40.2-3

[148] Polyb. 8.20.9-11 with McGing 2010: 27. Weeping is not a prerogative exclusive of Xerxes, it is a classic Hellenistic reaction (see Walbank 1967: 96). We may also note that similarities with Xerxes are not exclusive of Antiochus. Even Hannibal, at least in one episode, may have been equated to the Persian king (Polyb. 3.46 with McGing 2010: 53).

[149] The reasons given by Polybius for the ruin of Antiochus are Herodotean (*Tyche*) but not for the same reasons that would lead Xerxes to ruin, cf. Eckstein 1993: 210-15. On affinities between Philip V and Antiochus III, see also McGing 2010: 119-23, McGing 2013. On Hannibal as a Hellenistic character see MacDonald 2015: 7-23 and Rawlings 2005: 153-54.

> For all the inhabitants of the country on this side Taurus were not so much pleased at the defeat of Antiochus and at the prospect of the liberation of some of them from tribute, of others from garrisons, and of all from royal domination, as at their release from the fear of the barbarians and at the thought that they were now delivered from the lawless violence of these tribes. (Perrin, Loeb)

The passage has been interpreted as a reflection of the idea that the rule of the Seleucids over the Greek cities of Asia was tantamount to the rule of the barbarians over the Greeks at the time of the Persian Empire.[150] Antiochus, like any ruler, means taxes, domination and garrisons, however, Polybius' point seems to be another. The emphasis is on the fear of the barbarians and the ability to provide protection. What Polybius wants to say is that Romans are better at granting safety than the Seleucids.[151]

As we will see, there is a robust connection between Persia and Rome in Polybius but the common denominator is not Persian otherness, Antiochus as Persian despot, or the Persian Wars. He connects Rome and Persia in his discussion on the sequence of empires.

<u>(e) The sacrifice at Ilium (Livy 35.43).</u>

Livy, almost certainly following Polybius, tells us that Antiochus stopped at Ilium to perform a sacrifice and this encourages a parallel with the behaviour of Antiochus, Xerxes

[150] Primo 2009: 128-29.
[151] Eckstein 1993: 122-24.

and Alexander.[152] But there is little we can infer from that as far as the parallel Xerxes / Antiochus is concerned. First there is nothing in the account of Livy that suggests a connection with Xerxes or even with Herodotus. Second, if the visit to Ilium had been used, as it has been suggested, by both sides to support their claims over Asia,[153] there is little that may suggest that the sacrifice could have been interpreted (by whomever) as representative of some affinity between Antiochus and the Persians. Alexander is the only one whose visit to Troy might be interpreted as a direct response to Xerxes, this is certainly not the case for all the others (Antiochus, Scipio, Salinator). A connection between Antiochus, Xerxes and the Persians could be envisioned only if we assumed that the Romans at this point saw themselves (or presented themselves) as descendent of the Trojans (that is, Asians but related to the Greeks) who were taking over the rule of the world from the successors of Alexander (Antiochus) who, in turn, had obtained it from the Persians.[154] In other words, it must be assumed that this was the moment in which the foundation for the Roman re-elaboration of the theme of the clash between Europe and Asia were being laid down under the umbrella-concept of *translatio imperii*.[155] There is no proof of the opposite but to read this in the words of Livy, who does not say anything that could point in this direction, seems a stretch. It requires either a great ability to make connections by the reader, or it assumes that the idea of the passage of the *imperium orbis* to the Romans was very common knowledge. This does not seem to be the case for

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[152] 43.3 *priusquam solueret naues, Ilium a mari escendit ut Mineruae sacrificaret.* For the parallel: Briscoe 1981: 207, Grainger 2002: 194, Bernard 2015, Sordi 1982.
[153] Mastrocinque 1977-78: 14-16, Sordi 1982.
[154] On the complex issue of Trojan origin of Rome see Gabba 1976. The relevance of the theme of Trojan kinship and ancestry in this episode has been questioned with, in my opinion, a judicious argument by Erskine (2001: 225-37).
[155] This is Fabbrini's reading (1983: 129-45, 153-60).

191 BCE (but surely was so in the time Livy was writing).[156] Even accepting this possibility, nothing suggests that this could not be a later reinterpretation of the events (originated between 191 and Livy) since the only (possibly) contemporary document where we may find analogue themes is the *Alexandra* of Lycophron, by no means an unproblematic text (see infra).

<u>(f) The ‘Roman Passages’ of Lycophron’s *Alexandra*</u> present more problems and questions than certainties, beginning from the date of the composition. They are usually taken to refer to the Second Macedonian Wars but a case has been made recently for a later date, namely the Antiochene War.[157] According to this interpretation, the concluding prophecy presents the Romans as the successors of the Persians in the role of master of the world.

> And many contests and slaughters in between shall solve the struggles of men, contending for dread empire, now on land, now on the plough-turned backs of earth, until a tawny lion – sprung from Aeacus and from Dardanus, Thesprotian at once and Chalastraean – shall lull to rest the grievous tumult, and, overturning on its face all the house of his kindred, shall compel the chiefs of the Argives to cower and fawn upon the Wolf- general of Galadra, and to hand over the sceptre of the ancient monarchy. With him, after six generations, my kinsman, a unique wrestler, shall join battle by sea and land and come to terms, and shall be

[156] The date of birth of the idea of Rome as the master of the world is an object of discussion. High date (190-160 BCE, based on Livy 30.60.5 and Sura’s fragment): Alonso Nùñez 1989 and Fabbrini 1983: 152, contra Nicolet 1991: 30-31 text and note 15. Polybius seems to imply that the Greeks recognised Rome as the world power after Magnesia (Polyb. 21.16.8 and 21.23.4). But this may well be an interpretation *a fortiriori* by the historian or a rhetorical amplification (Walbank 1957: 42). Polybius, around 150 BCE, seems the most likely *terminus post quem*, cf. Walbank 1957: 292-297 and 635-36.

[157] Jones 2014. I will not discuss here the hypothesis of Momigliano, who thought of the Pyrrhic War.

> celebrated among his friends as most excellent, when he has received the first fruits of the spear-won spoils. (Mair, Loeb).
>
> Lycophron *Alexandra* 1435–50

For Jones, the themes we have seen in the episode of the sacrifice at Ilium (world dominion, who has the right to rule over Asia, the theme of Europe against Asia, the Romans as the heirs and avengers of the Trojans) would be inextricably linked with the idea of the passage of the sceptre (1129 and 1145) of the ancient monarchy from Achaemenid Persia, to Antiochus, and to Rome (all this, one may add, is emphasised by the long summary of Herodotus' narrative of the expedition of Xerxes that precedes the final prophecy (1412-1434)).[158]

The presence of the themes of the confrontation between Europe and Asia is undeniable, the idea of world power is very plausible but the reference to *translatio imperii* (and the analogy Antiochus / Persians) rests all on Jones' reading of the allegoric characters. If we accept the traditional interpretation of the section the whole allusion to a link between the Achaemenids and Rome disappears.[159]

In conclusion, the documents show that the expansion of Rome and clash with the Hellenic monarchs was sometimes conceived by some Greeks speaking to other Greeks to some extent as a clash East-West. But the comparison with the Persian wars was complex, not always automatic and often it was not clear who the barbarian was. In short, there is a possibility that Antiochus had been branded as a Persian despot and as

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[158] Both (e) and (f) bring about the issue of who has the right to rule over Asia, a theme that will play a very important part during the Mithridatic Wars but seems to have little bearing here.

[159] On the idea of world power, see Hornblower 2015: 437-38. Most recent traditional interpretation in Hornblower 2015: 114, 491-99.

a Xerxes in Greece. But those who did so seem to be the Rhodians, and, as we will see, Attalus. They both did so in a context in which they felt threatened by the Seleucid king and/or wanted to highlight their loyalty to Rome.[160] In other words, they may have felt the urgency to place emphasis on this and the consequence was a rhetorical amplification of their point. Greek writers who took a more 'Roman' side (Polybius, Lycophron, Alcaeus) may have been receptive to the idea of diversity between East and West as well, but they stress conciliation, continuity and unity under the Romans rather than opposition. Overall, throughout the second century BCE the trend seems to move towards a less clear-cut definition of the Persians and their aspirations of rule over Greece (perhaps because the Romans were barbarians and were exerting hegemony over Greece, so better to take a soft approach).

All this suggests two conclusions. First, that, even if the theme of the Persian Wars was still popular and sometimes used to bolster Greek amour propre, it could be read in many different ways. Second, that the assimilation of Antiochus to the Persians during the *Bellum Antiochicum* and its importance as a vehicle of Roman propaganda during Macedonian Wars should not be overestimated.

A Roman perspective.

If this was the situation in the eastern Greek world, at Rome, far from the war, where Greek historical memory was not an issue of political freedom and identity, what impact did this portrayal of Antiochus have on Roman culture? Was Antiochus perceived as

[160] Rawlings 1976.

Persian tyrant? If so, is it in any way significant and can we call it an example of Persianism?

Elaborating on the assumption that he had been branded as a Persian during the *Bellum Antiochicum*, those who think that Antiochus was seen by the Romans through the lenses of the Persian Wars, note that first, Florus makes a very precise comparison between the Seleucid king and Xerxes. Second, they perceive a certain insistence on the theme of the 'crossing of the Hellespont' in Livy's account and observe that Livy portrays Antiochus in a way that is strikingly reminiscent of Xerxes.[161] They deduce that Livy, like Florus, must have had the precedent of the Persian Wars in mind when he narrated the events of 192-191. The conclusions drawn by the reading of Livy are then used to interpret a fragment of Ennius that mentions the Hellespont. And, since Ennius was very close to the events, they conclude that 'The fragment clearly has to do with the apprehension felt at Rome in 192' (Skutsch) implying thereby that this parallel was not a rhetorical construct *a fortiriori* or a poetic licence but a reflection of current ideas, which may have influenced the decision of the senate to mobilise the army (it was not the only, nor the main reason, of course).[162]

If this line of reasoning is accepted, then one must conclude that the Romans not only had historical knowledge of the Persian Wars, could detect allusions to them, and use them, for example to captivate Greek favour, but also that they considered them as a precedent of such significance to influence their decisions; in other words, they had become part of their 'collective memory'. And this is the conclusion of, for example, Ettore Paratore.[163]

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[161] Vahlen 1928 and Moggi 1972, see n. 4.
[162] Skutsch 1985: 535, Paratore 1966: 519.
[163] 1966: 520.

There are two objections to this. The first is rather obvious. I have suggested that, even in Greece, the idea of Antiochus as a Persian despot was not particularly pervasive. If this is the case, how, one may ask, could the precedent of the Persian Wars have become part of the 'collective memory' of the Romans? How could it be so relevant that it influenced their decisions? Moreover, I have also tried to show that the usage of themes from the Persian wars was complex, nuanced and even ambiguous.[164] Given this premise, why would anyone be willing to invest in a form of propaganda based on such ambiguous foundations? The second is more elaborate and challenges the interpretation of the Latin sources: Ennius, Livy and Florus.

Antiochus and Xerxes in Ennius.[165]

The first passage that supposedly presents a parallel between Xerxes and Antiochus III occurs in Ennius, in a fragment of the *Annales* quoted by Varro. It has been included in the thirteenth book, the section of the poem that, with book fourteen, deals with the war with Antiochus III.[166]

> *Cassi: 'Ellespontum et claustra' quod Xerxem quondam eum locum clausit; nam ut Ennium ait: '***isque Hellesponto pontem contendit in alto***', nisi potius ab eo quod Asia et Europa ibi concluditur mare; inter angustias facit Propontidis fauces.*

[164] Alcaeus, see above, cf. also Lycophron (1414) with Hornblower 2015: 489.

[165] Flores 392 (with commentary: 325) = Skutsch 369 = Vahlen^2 378 (from Varro *Ling.* 7.21) (tr. Loeb with variations).

[166] Of the four fragments of book 13 the first refers to the building of a bridge over the Hellespont, the second to the 'salty marshes' of the Hellespont. The third and fourth fragments belong to a discussion of the war by Antiochus III and Hannibal.

> [in these verses] Of Cassius: "the Hellespont and the barriers" [he uses the word 'claustra'] because at a certain time Xerxes enclosed that place; for, as Ennius says "**and this man extended a bridge over the deep Hellespont**". Unless it is said rather from the fact that [= the word 'claustra' is used because] at this place the sea 'is hemmed in' by Asia and Europe; in the narrows it forms the entrance to Propontis. (Kent, Loeb; with my bold)

Varro is offering two possible interpretations of the use of *claustra* (barriers) in Cassius' poem. Either it refers – he says – to the bridge of boats made by Xerxes (and here he quotes Ennius) or it refers to the shores of the Propontis.

There is no reason to doubt that *isque* refers to Xerxes and this makes this fragment the first reference in extant Latin literature to his crossing of the Hellespont. Even without written evidence we know that educated Romans were well acquainted with Athenian orators and Herodotus to assume that the story was common knowledge.[167] But this does not tell us much about what Ennius did with this idea and how he appropriated it. What exactly was the reason for bringing forth Xerxes? Is this a simple rhetorical commonplace (when somebody crosses the Hellespont, Xerxes springs automatically to mind) or is there a meaningful connection between Antiochus and Xerxes perhaps in relation to the ambivalent attitude of the Greeks towards Rome mentioned above? [168]

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[167] On Greek training of Latin orators and the diffusion of Greek culture at Rome in the 3rd-2nd century BCE see Marrou 1956: 242-47.

[168] Rosivach 1984. The theme was commonplace enough that a little later Propertius and Manilius felt the need to dissociate themselves from using such cliché (Bridges 2015: 158-59).

The discussion of Varro does not help to clarify it. Even conceding that Cassius' reference to the Hellespont (*Ellespontum et claustra*) contains an allusion to Xerxes, we cannot really contextualize it, let alone allow for the possibility that there is a parallel with Antiochus! It is true that, if the *Cassi* mentioned is Cassius Emnia, a contemporary of Ennius and Terence and the author of an *Annales,* then we may not exclude the possibility that he, in his work, had referred to Antiochus' manoeuvres around the Hellespont. But this conclusion is highly speculative for at least two reasons. First, because we know precious little of his work. Second, because there is always the possibility that the *Cassi* should be emended to *quasi* undermining completely the flimsy foundation of this reading.[169] Moreover, it seems quite probable that it was not entirely evident to Varro either whether the passage he was commenting on included a specific reference to the Persian king or not. Otherwise why would he have felt the need to add a possible alternative interpretation of *claustra* that has little to do with Xerxes and his bridge?[170] On these very shaky foundations it is impossible to infer anything about a comparison with Antiochus.

Antiochus and Xerxes in Livy.

Livy offers more material to work with. There are four episodes that hark back to the events of the Persian Wars in his narration of the *Bellum Antiochicum.* The first, in which

[169] For discussion and implications see Esposito et al. 2006: 325-29 (*Cassi*) and Skutsch 1985 ad locum (*quasi*). Either way, we would have to ask ourselves if this Cassius or anonymus author had also intended to allude to Xerxes.

[170] Varro is offering two possible interpretations of the use of *claustra* (barriers) in Cassius' poem. Either it refers to the bridge of boats made by Xerxes or it refers to the shores of the Propontis. Cassius (or whoever) was surely speaking of the Hellespont but he must have been speaking of something not directly related to the bridge of boats. This does not mean that Xerxes was not mentioned but, one suspects that, if he had been, Varro would have been less likely to have difficulties in the interpretation. De Melo 2019: 924 finds the second possibility (Propontis) more likely.

nothing points to Xerxes, except the geographical setting, is of little relevance.[171] The second is the passage used by Vahlen and others to support their interpretation of Ennius.[172] In 192 BCE, Livy says, the Romans had been busy subduing unrest in various areas, but the possibility of a war with Antiochus 'disquieted the senate' more than the ongoing wars.[173] At this point rumours (that Livy deems ungrounded) begin to spread, the most worrying being the intention of Antiochus to send a fleet to Sicily (35.23.2-9). To add to the tension, Attalus arrives at Rome and reports to the senate that Antiochus has crossed the Hellespont.

> *addidit alimenta rumoribus aduentus Attali, Eumenis fratris, qui nuntiauit Antiochum regem Hellespontum cum exercitu transisse et Aetolos ita se parare ut sub aduentum eius in armis essent. et Eumeni absenti et praesenti Attalo gratiae actae et aedes liberae, locus, lautia decreta et munera data: equi duo, bina equestria arma et uasa argentea centum pondo et aurea uiginti pondo.*
>
> Livy 35.23.10-11

> Rumors were also fueled by the arrival of Eumenes' brother, Attalus, who reported that King Antiochus had crossed (*transisse)* the Hellespont with his army, and that the Aetolians were preparing themselves so efficiently that they would be under arms by the time he arrived. Both men were thanked, Eumenes in his absence and Attalus in person. Attalus was also awarded, by decree, state

[171] 33.38.1-14 Does not appear in Mastrocinque's list.
[172] 35.23.1-11
[173] 35.23.1 *minus ea bella quae gerebantur curae patribus erant quam expectation nondum coepti cum Antiocho belli*.

> accommodation and entertainment, and given as a present two horses, two sets of horseman’s armor, silver vases weighing a hundred pounds and gold vases weighing twenty. (Yardley, Loeb)

There are two points worth mentioning here. One is that Attalus is amplifying and distorting the events. Or at least this is what Livy wants us to think. In fact, when one proceeds with the reading one realises that Attalus must be referring to Antiochus’ crossing of 198 BCE. Six years before! Livy tells us that, later that year (that is, after the meeting with Attalus in the senate), ‘while the Romans were busy preparing the war [with Antiochus]’ Antiochus was busy dealing with recalcitrant towns in the coastal area of Anatolia and preparing an expedition for Hannibal.[174] Moreover, we may note that the declaration of war, which occurred after the peroration of Attalus, despite being directed to both the Aetolians and Antiochus, does not mention, as justification, any manoeuvre or wrongdoing by the king.[175] This fact, in itself unusual, is even more surprising because Rome had previously warned Antiochus not to mingle with Greek affairs: this would have been a perfect *casus belli*. The only explanation for this is that the Romans, when they declared war, had not yet received information about Antiochus crossing, therefore Attalus could not be referring to this event.[176] He was at best bluffing and exaggerating (since in 198 Antiochus was not invading Europe – he was simply occupying Thracian Chersonesus – certainly not as a ‘new Xerxes’ – and, more importantly, it was an event which had happened several years before), or at worst he was making things up. Attalus’ purpose was obviously (in Livy, and arguably in reality) to provoke Rome’s intervention,

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[174] 35.42.1 *intentis in apparatum noui belli Romanis ne ab Antiocho quidem cessabatur.*
[175] 36.1.
[176] Eckstein 2008: 327.

so it is understandable that he, an educated Asian-Greek, might have used all the rhetorical tricks available, including the crossing of the Hellespont and the almost automatic parallel with Xerxes in order to shake the senate. And this brings us to the second point of interest; namely, that, although this could have been a strong argument for a Greek audience, it failed to influence the decision of the *patres.* In fact, they showed appreciation to Attalus for the information, acknowledged the fact, and rapidly dismissed it. The important decision to recall the consul and not to delay the elections (a necessary step before sending men directly against Antiochus in Greece) was made not because of Attalus' peroration, but only when more and more reports of the imminence of the war reached Rome.[177]

As Livy presents it, Attalus' rhetoric and the ghost of Xerxes do not succeed in alarming the *patres*. What provokes the anxiety of the Romans and a rather excessive reaction of the senate is not so much the fear of the eastern enemy but the rumours of a possible invasion of Sicily, which brings about the memory of Hannibal and his rampage on the Italian soil.[178] In fact, it is Hannibal who suggests that the war should be brought to Italy;[179] he is the one who advises that a fleet be sent to the Tyrrhenian Sea.[180] In short, Livy builds a narrative in which the threat of Antiochus is perceived as a threat from Hannibal. The parallel Antiochus / Xerxes falls on deaf ears.

The third time the Hellespont is mentioned is when a delegate of Antiochus speaks in front of the Greeks in Achaia and describes the 'innumerable' forces of the king

[177] Livy 35.24.1.
[178] 36.6.19. The Romans fear an attack to Italy (Eckstein, 2008: 327-28 lists several measures of protection).
[179] 34.60.
[180] That the focus is on Hannibal is evident. Livy gives to the Xerxes' threat one line while he gives 8 to the fanciful possibility that Antiochus had planned an expedition to Sicily. So, in this passage, the fear of Hannibal wins the fear of Xerxes 8:1.

'crossing the Hellespont'.[181] Livy is adamant in his judgment: the envoy of the king is 'boastful' (*uaniloquus*), he wants to impress the listeners therefore he presents the army as enormous but, as the response of Flaminius exposes, the situation is completely different. The king is only appearance and no substance, has very few men and his army is composed of Syrians, a race not much better than slaves rather than fierce warriors.[182]

Thus, we have the Seleucid envoy comparing Antiochus to Xerxes and Flaminius denying it. The entire situation appears paradoxical and implausible.[183] We may never know whether this speech comes from Livy or one of his sources. But we may glimpse what Livy's purpose was. Surely, he tries to make Antiochus look like the aggressor and the Romans as the protectors of the Greeks. But, more importantly, the episode squares perfectly with the character of the king when we place it against the other option Antiochus had: to follow Hannibal's suggestion. If he had crossed to Italy, he could have become a problem for Rome. He crossed to Greece with a ridiculous force and without firmness of purpose. He is not a Hannibal who with few men and a mixed army had managed to almost destroy Rome not even a Xerxes, who had moved Asia in its entirety.[184] He is Antiochus, in every respect a somewhat lesser figure. Livy's depiction of Antiochus is tailored for his Roman public and its collective fears.[185] This may explain why Flaminius does not reply to the ambassadors by assimilating Antiochus to Xerxes (which would have made a sensible argument in Achaia).

[181] 35.48 (g). *equitum innumerabilem uim traici Hellesponto in Europam.*
[182] 35.49.8.
[183] Grainger 2002: 200.
[184] Hannibal: 21.38.
[185] On Hannibal as the bogeyman, cf. Cic. *Philippic* 1.11 and 5.26.

The last episode of some importance reminiscent of the Persian Wars is treated in a similar way. At the Thermopylae (i) where Xerxes had won and the Gauls had managed to pass, Antiochus is defeated and runs away in a frantic flight.[186]

> *Thermopylae locus appellatur, nobilis Lacedaemoniorum aduersus Persas morte magis memorabili quam pugna. haudquaquam pari tum animo Antiochus intra portas loci eius castris positis munitionibus insuper saltum impediebat…*
>
> Livy 36.15.12-16.1

> The place is called the Thermopylae, famous for the death of the Spartans against the Persians, more memorable than the battle. By no means with similar feelings Antiochus, when he placed his camp between the doors, encircled the area with fortifications. (Yardley, Loeb)

Livy at Thermopylae presents a disillusioned king who cannot trust or control his allies on whose help he has naively counted and pays no heed to the Persians but directly compares Antiochus to the Spartans.[187] What for them had been a 'last stand', a heroic and voluntary endeavour, for the king is the mirror of his desperation in the face of the events. 'His feeling was very different from that of the Spartans' says Livy. Again, Xerxes is just a footnote. And this is consistent with the historical events, the episode may have

[186] Livy 36.16-17 and 36.19.9. Cf. App. *Syr.* 20 [90-92], Polybius' account is lost and there is only a short quotation from Livy 36.19.11. On the episode of the Gaulish invasion of 279 see Habicht 1997: 130-33, on the Gauls see Shipley 2000: 52-54, on the Attalids, Shipley 2000: 312-320.

[187] Cf. the speech of Flaccus (Livy 36.17). We may note that Livy's version is rather different from both versions of Xerxes' flight as told by Hdt. 8.113-119.

acquired significance in retrospect but at the time, as Mastrocinque notes, 'non potè ispirare … paragoni col 480 a.C.'.[188]

To sum up, Xerxes and the Hellespont are mentioned, Thermopylae is recalled, but apart from the geographical coincidence of some episodes and the similar outcome, the memory of the Persian Wars has little or no part in Livy's narrative of the *Bellum Antiochicum*. When it appears, it causes reactions if used by the Greeks to the benefit of a Greek audience. When it is used at Rome, the Roman public was not impressed at all. With regard to characters, those who call the shots and make the difference are Hannibal, the Roman generals and the Roman senate; Antiochus is a minor figure among giants.[189] The aim of Livy is to belittle him and extol the virtues of the Romans, not to make a parallel with the Persian kings. This suggests that the parallel Xerxes – Antiochus had little relevance for Livy's public, which, in turn, suggests that there was no tradition proclaiming this and that Rome's anxiety in 192 BCE did not stem from any connections between Antiochus and Xerxes, which is, if anything, denied.

With this in mind, what conclusions can we draw from Livy about the verses of Ennius? Perhaps in Ennius' poem the perception of Antiochus as a new Xerxes was relevant and meaningful. Maybe the Romans were afraid of him. But this is not what Livy says.[190] At most, we can say that the fragment from the *Annals* could belong to the speech of Attalus which, apparently, did not shock the Romans very much. This does not deny the allusion to Xerxes or that Attalus' references were not understood but since

[188] Mastrocinque 1977-78: 13.
[189] Antiochus and Hannibal 36.7-8, 36.11, 36.15.1-2, Antiochus versus the senate 36.1-6.
[190] We may allow for some twisting of the facts by Livy, however, it is unlikely that he had completely turned upside down what he had found in his sources or invented the events. If there had been a strong case for a parallel between Xerxes and Antiochus he could not have ignored it. It is rather most likely that he had picked some less relevant details and re-elaborated them.

nothing suggests that in Livy 35.22.10 'il pensiero dei Romani era andato a Serse nel timore ispirato dalla notizia che Antioco il Grande aveva attraversato l'Ellesponto con l'esercito' we are left with pure speculation.[191] In short, if Livy's position reflects that of Ennius the parallel is not there, if it does not, we lack basis to interpret Ennius.

Antiochus and Xerxes in Florus

The other, and this time explicit, reference to Antiochus as Xerxes is in two passages by Florus. In the first he suggests that Antiochus was perceived by the Romans as a Persian. In the second he makes a precise parallel between the *Bellum Antiochichum* and the Persian Wars.

> *Non aliud formidolosius fama bellum fuit; quippe cum Persas et orientem, Xerxen atque Darium cogitarent, quando perfossi invii montes, quando velis opertum mare nuntiaretur.*
>
> Flor. 1.24.2-3

> Report never represented any war as more formidable than this, as the Romans bethought them of the Persians and the East, of Xerxes and Darius, of the days when impassable mountains were said to have been cut through and the sea hidden with sails. (Forster, Loeb)

[191] Paratore 1966: 519.

Ne sibi placeant Athenae; in Antiocho vicimus Xerxen, in Aemilio Alcibiaden Aequavimus, Epheso Salamina pensavimus'

Flor. 1.24.13-14

Let not Athens be over-proud: in Antiochus we defeated a Xerxes; in Aemilius we had an equal to Alcibiades; at Ephesus we rivalled Salamis. (Forster, Loeb)

It is hard to see how useful Florus can be in reconstructing the attitude of the Romans towards the Persians in 190 BCE. First, his perception of the Greek past is biased, for one of the purposes of his work is to mark the superiority of Rome over Greece.[192] Second, there is a considerable temporal gap between Ennius and the historian and it is demonstrable that he had been heavily influenced by contemporary and recent history. Several factors which may have distorted his perception can be pointed out. There is Hadrian's phil-Hellenism.[193] There is the Augustan re-reading of the theme of the Persian Wars which was part of a wider programme that promoted simultaneously affinity of the Greeks and the Romans, and superiority of the latter.[194] And there is – again under Augustus – the rise in interest in universal themes. Lastly, there are the rhetorical works such as those of the elder Seneca and Valerius Maximus who saw the later Achaemenids as decadent and impotent.[195] This would better explain the passages than a supposed

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[192] Bridges 2015: 160. See, for another example, the parallel between Leonidas and Calpunius Flamma. (Flor. 1.24.13 also 1.18.12-14).
[193] Cf. Flamerie de Lachapelle 2010.
[194] There are many examples: Livy, (as we have seen, he depicts the Greeks as litigious, reckless and irresponsible (e.g. 9.18.6)), the iconographic programme of Augustus, or the beginning of the third *Georgic* and Horace's *Carmen* 3.30; cf. Galinsky 1996: 332-363.
[195] To hypothesise that Florus was reproducing a second-century historiographic tradition that connected the defeat of Antiochus to the idea of *translatio imperii* (Russo 2018: 62-63) has little plausibility. See above, (e) The sacrifice at Ilium

tradition harking back to the end of the second century. In short, Florus may be interesting for a number of reasons but does not integrate or help very much to interpret Ennius.

Plautus

There is another text which may be appropriate to discuss briefly at this point. It is a comedy of Plautus, the only author (roughly) contemporary of Ennius whose works have survived and the first to mention the Persians in Latin literature. The *Persa* receives its name from the stratagem concocted by the slave Toxilus who persuades his mate Sagaristio to dress up in Persian costume in order to sell a fake Arabian girl to the pimp Dordalus. Saragistio is then described as dressed as a king and wearing typical Persian headgear, the tiara. On the surface the situation suggests that the way a Persian could be envisaged was as a king or possibly a satrap and that a Persian merchant of slaves was a credible character for a Roman audience. But, when we read with more attention, we realise that the scene simply implies that Saragistio is evidently in disguise.[196] His Persian costume is as vague as it can be and the only truly Persian item of his camouflage is the tiara. If we analyse the scene in its entirety, it becomes clear that its humour derives from the possibility that Dordalus could realise that he was object of a scam. Plautus suggests this eventuality several times. Twice Dordalus seems on the verge of decoding the ambiguous words of Toxilus and Toxilus, at some point, interrupts the negotiation to suggest Dordalus to inspect the 'goods' more carefully; this leads to an exchange

[196] Richlin 2005: 173. Inferences are based on the surviving text but there is ample scope for speculation here, for we do not have any stage directions, nor we know much about costumes, stage decoration and acting technique.

between the buyer and the young girl that could potentially disclose the scheme.[197] A spectator could also find suspicious (although possibly acceptable in the logic of a play) that there is no language barrier between the false Persian Saragisto, the false Arabian girl and Dordalus. With this in mind, the description of the Persian as *exornatus basilice,* 'decked out as a king' or 'royally disguised', and the only detail of the girl's garments, a *crepidula*, a sandal (*κρηπίς*) used by the Greeks and the Romans who adopted Greek habits seem to suggest that the Persian character of their attire is hardly believable.[198] The purpose of the scene is clearly to deride the pimp and disclose his stupidity. The improbable Persian disguise, almost a caricature, is an element of the joke. It could be argued that caricatures or even slightly unpleasant characters may well have corresponded to the popular idea of the Persian. But this is not a very convincing argument. For the same consideration extends to several Plautian comic characters who are socially inferior and are ethnically portrayed as foreigners.[199] Moreover, in order for the gag to be understood, one must acknowledge that the public would not have automatically identified a Persian with the Persian king and would have realised the inconsistency of the disguise. It is only the dumb Dordalus who can think someone is Persian because he wears a tiara, not the Roman public.

Even the name that Saragisto makes up has similar purpose.[200] Certainly, the joke with foreign names is a staple of Plautinian witticism that has an antecedent in the

[197] 490, 581 and 591.
[198] Cf. Livy 29.19.11-12.
[199] Gregoris 2012: 48 and notes.
[200] SAG
Vaniloquidorus Virginesuendonides
Nugiepiloquides Argentumexterebronides
Tedigniloquides Nuncaesexpalponides
Quodsemelarripides Numquameripides. em tibi!
DOR

Poenulus. The difference is that in the *Poenulus* the language plays a very important part (it has satirical, realistic, narrative and comic functions) and, even if the Punic language may have been unintelligible to most (provided that the text is a transliteration of real Punic), many would have had enough familiarity with it to identify it from its sound.[201] In the *Persa,* the grammelot is a mixture of Greek and Latin that does not seem to have any connection with any oriental – albeit fictional – language, not even the fictional Persian names popular in Greek areas.[202] Even if Persian may not have been as familiar to the public as Carthaginian, it is hard to believe that the ability of Plautus to play with linguistic registers and of his audience to understand the jokes had shrunk. It is much more likely that the purpose of the joke be different. In fact, barely disguised behind the Greek patronymic endings, is the description of the scam. The joke, if anything, adds to the lack of plausibility of the disguise.[203]

So much for the characters in the *Persa*, what about the land of Persia? Persia is a land with golden mountains;[204] where the booty of an unimaginably rich (*Crysopolis,*

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doreu hercle! nomen multimodis scriptum est tuom.
SAG
sagita sunt Persarum mores, longa nomina,
contortiplicata habemus. numquid ceterumuoltis?

SAG
Vainspeakerpresent Girlsellerson Nonsenseadderson Silverdiggerson Serveyourighttalkerson Moneywheedlerson Whativegrabbedonceson
Youllnevergetbackson. There you go!
DOR
Goodness! Your name takes a lot of writing.
SAG
That's the Persian tradition: we have long, complicated names. Do you two want anything else?
Plautus *Persa 703-709* (de Melo, Loeb).

[201] See Gregoris 2012: 69 on language in the *Poenulus.* On the passage in the *Poenulus* cf. Gratwick 1971. On the familiarity of the public with Carthaginian language: Adams 2003: 203-06. Also, differently from Saragisto, Hanno is also truly Carthaginian, and bilingual.

[202] Faller 2001: 189-93.

[203] The Persian name(s) allude to the fact that Sagaristio is swindling money from Dordalus (Richlin 2005: 177).

[204] *Stichus* 24-25. Possibly populated by legendary creatures (*Aul.* 701).

literally a city of gold) and exotic city is auctioned for months,[205] where kings are the paradigm of wealth.[206] Persian wealth is very likely a reverberation of the traditional Greek model with possible echoes of weakness caused by Persian *tryphe*. The suspicion arises, however, that Persian golden coins and golden mountains are simple metonymies for wealth and land of marvels, with little ethnic value attached. The Persian kings do not seem to differ substantially from any other oriental sovereigns such as Attalus or Philip.[207] They all are terms of comparison for great wealth.[208] Wealth, in turn, is central to almost every plot; there is usually a lover who needs money to free a slave-prostitute and has no clue how to find it. There is often a character, greedy and miserly, who happens to have the means. There is a cunning slave whose task consists of deceiving the latter and swindle him out of some money or the girl. Given the obvious anti-social component of this behaviour, for a traditionalist Roman, it is essential that this character is a non-Roman with ambiguous moral features.[209] To put it simply, in each comedy there are characters belonging to a varied series of marginalized categories, whether they are freemen, slaves, pimps, or foreigners, busy making money, hiding money, appropriating other people's money,

To sum up, in the *Persae* there is a slave dressed up in an (ill-devised) disguise that vaguely recalls a Persian king but resembles more a caricature and some faint

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[205] *Persa* 506-7.
[206] *Aul.* 85-86: *Mirum quin tua me causam faciat Iuppiter/ Philippum regem Dareum* ('it is quite extraordinary that Juppiter does not turn me into a Philip or a Darius, for your sake.' (De Melo, Loeb)). An allusion to the coinage of Philip II, see Frankel 1960:15-16, text and note 1 and Paratore 1966: 511.
[207] *Persa* 339-340; *Aul.* 85-84, 704, *Pers.* 339.
[208] As Fraenkel (1960: 16) noted, for Plautus, Philip is the man on the coin rather than the historic character. Cf. also Richlin 2005: 38.
[209] *pessumus Pseudulus* 1310, *pessumum Miles* 1374, *pessimus corruptor Persa* 779. On bad and good in Plautus' slaves and their actions, see Anderson 1993: 88-106. We may note that the abandonment to pleasures and *luxuria* – its quintessential representation is the banquet – is by Plautus defined as *pergraecari:* 'living as a Greek' (cf. Petrone 2009: 147-53).

allusions to Persian wealth, not much to go on. Certainly, Plautus is not helpful in contextualizing Ennius' fragment. But can it be said that Plautus and his public rely on a shared collective cultural memory of Persia to create a meaningful text? Was Plautus working on an idea of Persia present in the minds of his listeners or building on shared knowledge and memory to create a new collective memory (of Persia)? Certainly, in our example, the inclusion in a text of a certain idea or stereotype (Persian wealth and weakness) implies, to some extent, selectivity on part of the author (if he had thought that Persians were examples of poverty, he would probably have selected another ethnic group). However, the level of engagement of the text with the idea is very limited. None of the possible implications is picked up and the stereotype appears in complete isolation, suggesting an unsophisticated interaction with the source (with respect to the ideas expressed by the stereotype, not in general) on the part of the author and, if we assume that any texts require an implied reader, that the author assumes unawareness on his/her part (of the implied reader). Again, a comparison between the *Persae* and the *Poenulus* might be useful. In the latter the expectation of interplay between the spectator and the text has much more weight as the jokes on language demonstrate and suggests that 'the Carthaginians' was a familiar concept, one that had been interiorized with a long and bloody war. Persia, by contrast, had not been codified yet.

In conclusion, there is some evidence suggesting that in the Greek-speaking world a parallel between Antiochus and the Persian invaders may have been elaborated and there is the possibility that the theme had been adopted by the Romans to the use and consumption of the Greek public during the Macedonian and Antiochene Wars. But caution should be exerted not to attribute excessive weight to this idea. The Persian Wars theme may have been used in a variety of manners that are not easy to categorize and it

would have been difficult for anyone, let alone the Romans, to use it in a straightforward way. Furthermore, with hindsight, the coincidences, admittedly, are too striking not to be noted and there is more than a suspicion that later writers could not have resisted the temptation to develop them.

As for Roman perceptions, when we look at the supposed influence of Greek perception of Persia during the war with Antiochus, we must acknowledge that the educated ones were perfectly able to understand the importance of historical precedents – including Greek ones – and to act accordingly, but the propagandistic manoeuvring of the Greeks did not have an effect on them nor did they influence their actions and decisions. If we search for engagement with the memory of the Persian Wars in the terms delineated in the introduction, we must conclude that there is little. Livy is hardly appropriating Persian memories nor does he seem to reflect an appropriation of them by his sources. The theme only appears in the background; we could remove all the references to Xerxes and the narrative would not be significantly affected. Plautus plays with some stereotypes common to many of his comedies and his jokes have little Persian colour. Finally, Ennius is an unknown variable. In short, it cannot be affirmed (nor, admittedly, denied) that any of the writers mentioned engaged with his audience in a dialogue founded on a shared idea of Persia, whether based on *triphe*, degeneracy, wealth, or anything, or that they built new collective memories by appropriating the Greek perception of Persia. It cannot also unquestionably be claimed that, at the beginning of the second century BCE and for many years, the Romans perceived Antiochus as a new Xerxes, that they perceived him in any way as the Persians were perceived by the Greeks, or that they tried to identify themselves to the victorious Athenians/Greeks. This is an interpretation based on Florus' reading of the events,

retroactively applied to Livy and to Ennius. Nothing suggests that the Persian Wars, or the story of Darius, Xerxes, and their Greek rivals, had become part of their 'cultural memory'. For a more solid case of Persianism we need to wait for the arrival on the stage of Mithridates VI.

2. The Persianism of Mithridates IV Eupator

Roman Persianism starts with the Mithridatic Wars. These long conflicts are a crucial moment in many respects: after them Roman eastern policy changes, so does her understanding of the relations between the components of the empire and the image that Rome wanted to project.[210] But the most important role is played by the personalities involved. Whereas Antiochus III was offering to the (Greek) world an image of Philhellene (with strong Alexandrian nuances) and Rome responded by using a similar version of Philhellenism and could – by defeating him – suggest that he was nothing but a lesser Alexander and a lesser Hannibal, Mithridates VI combined both worlds: he was a legitimate Asiatic king with an impeccable Persian-Hellenic pedigree. In the war with Mithridates, the Romans encountered an ideology that was based on the myth of Alexander and, for the first time, on the memory of Achaemenid Persia. As a consequence of this encounter, they absorbed and re-adapted some elements of this ideology. It is a long process that unfolded in three phases. First, the rise of Mithridates.

[210] On the First Mithridatic War as a pivotal moment in the process of imperial self-awareness of the Romans, see Beness and Hillard 2013: 141-50. Mithridatic Wars: General situation, events and intentions between 99 and 91 BCE: Hind 1994 (*CHA*2/9): 140-44, McGing 2009, 203-16, Sherwin-White 1984, 106-9, 121-3, Gruen 1984, 260ff., Luce, 1970, Kallet-Marx 1995: 223-60, Madsen 2009. The wars: Hind 1994 (*CAH*2/9): 144-64 and n. 66 for bibliography, McGing 1986: 89-131, McGing 2003, Kallet-Marx 1995: 261-334, Sherwin-White 1984: 108-203, Magie 1950 (Vol. 1): 177-378, Sherwin-White 1994 (*CAH2*/9): 229-65. Biographies of Mithridates: Reinach 1890, Ballesteros-Pastor 1996, Mayor 2009.

Second, the reaction to Mithridates' successes by Sulla and Lucullus. Finally, the arrival of Persia as a captive of Pompey who used her to magnify his success and as a weapon in his political feud with Lucullus.

Mithridates and his image.

Mithridates VI Eupator is, after Hannibal, the most notorious of Republican Rome's enemies. He managed to deprive Rome of a great part of her possessions in Asia and, for a period, even controlled a substantial part of mainland Greece. If we believe the reports, he was the mastermind behind the greatest carnage of Romans after the second Punic War.[211] How did he manage to inflict such a blow on Rome?

Part of the responsibility rests on Rome's inertia and distraction, but Mithridates certainly played his hand well. Despite the remoteness of Pontus and the fact that they had little interest in getting involved in the area of the Black Sea, the Romans must have been well-aware of the intentions of Mithridates.[212] The presence of ambitious monarchs willing to extend their control over neighbouring potentates had been a constant feature of the Hellenistic world and the Pontic kings were no exception to this tendency. Eupator's predecessors had all tried to place their kingdom in a preeminent position in the area, whether by military means or by strategic alliances often through marriages.[213] These movements provoked diplomatic exchanges and, already in 181 BCE there were

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[211] Roman casualties at Cannae: Polyb. 3.117, Livy 22.49.15-18. Goldsworthy 2007: 191. Asian Vespers: App. *Mith*. 23 [85-91]; sources: Mayor 2010: 383 n. 2, discussion: Del Hoyo et al. 2009.
[212] On the Pontic dynasty: Erciyas 2006: 8-17, McGing 1984: 13-42, Bosworth and Wheatley 1998, Ballesteros-Pastor 1996: 19-36, Hind 1994 (*CAH*2/9): 130-33, Reinach 1890. On the early years of Mithridates to the First Mithridatic War: Ballesteros-Pastor 1996: 37-80, McGing 1986: 43-88, McGing 2009. On relations Rome, Pontic kingdom and Mithridates: Ballesteros-Pastor 1986: 442-62.
[213] Pharnaces (189/8-160), Mithridates IV Philopator Philadelphos (160-150), and Mithridates V Euergetes (150-120).

no less than three embassies sent to Rome from Rhodes, Eumenes and Pharnaces.[214] At least two more delegations were sent to Rome in 124 and 104 BCE.[215] Thanks to the friendship of Rome Mithridates Euergetes had obtained Phrygia and subsequently had expanded his sphere of influence into Paphlagonia and Galatia and laid the ground for the occupation of Cappadocia by marrying his daughter Laodice to Ariarathes VI. Mithridates IV, between 115 and 89 BCE, made several attempts to expand his kingdom first in the Bosphorus and Crimea, then in Paphlagonia and Galatia and finally in Cappadocia. These manoeuvres, which followed the pattern established by his predecessors, did not alert the senate probably because they must have appeared perfectly manageable in the same way similar issues had been managed until that moment. But then, suddenly, Mithridates changed his strategy and took the adversary by surprise. In less than a year, either in the summer of 88 BCE, or between summer and the end of 89 BCE, he brought Anatolia under his control and expelled the Romans.[216]

Although the Romans liked to present him as a powerful, cunning and dangerous enemy, and it is not impossible that in the very beginning he might have been perceived as such, the ancient observers soon realised that his military might was not a major danger. The unexpectedness of his movements and the distraction of Rome, combined with a lethargic response, could explain his successes better than his military superiority. Sulla must have been among the first to realise this. He did not need to face him in battle, his two victories in Greece against his lieutenants (Chaeronea and Orchomenus) demonstrated the superiority of Roman armies and even the two unruly Fimbrian legions created no little difficulty to the king. In his speech at Dardanus, Sulla throws back in the

[214] Polyb. 23.9.3, Livy 40.2.5, Polyb. 24.1.2.3, 24.5.1-8, Dio. 29.22, cf. McGing 1986: 25-32.
[215] A. Gellius *NA* 11.10 and Just. 37.4.4-9.
[216] Cf. Sherwin-White 1984: 121-128 for details, discussion of chronology and bibliography.

king's face the fact that he had managed to be successful only insofar as the Romans were busy elsewhere.[217] Even conceding some measure of distortion for self-aggrandisment on Sulla's part, the curt and scathing evaluation of the deeds of Mithridates and the sneering remarks on the danger he represented show clearly the low consideration the Roman general had for Eupator's military might.[218] It is no coincidence that in all reports (all based on works dating well after the conclusion of the First Mithridatic War), the fearsome aspect of his character is often an ideological construct, while the danger he poses appears to be an amplification. Features such as treacherousness, wealth, debauchery and cruelty, which were often emphasised to stress his damaging actions, are common place.[219] So were the Hannibalic traits of his personality, especially his hatred for everything Roman, his plans to invade Italy and his resilience.[220] Even the shock provoked by the killing of the Italians in 88 quickly became a useful tool in the political contest.[221]

However, if the Roman lack of preparation and Mithridates' surprise strategy explain his early military successes, they do not fully explain the ease and swiftness with which he took possession of Asia and, more importantly, the speed with which the locals aligned themselves with him and his request to slaughter the Italians.[222] The reasons for the enthusiastic reception of the king must be found in the special combination of economic, personal, social, ethnic and cultural factors that constituted Mithridates'

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[217] App. *Mith*. 57-55 [230-240].
[218] Santangelo 2007: 33.
[219] Cic. *Leg. Man.* 22, cf. Steel 2001: 127, Cic. *Pro Flac*. 60 (*servator Asiae*), Sall. *Hist.* 4.69.6-8M [=Maurenbrecher] = *Epistula Mithridatis* (correspondences in various editions, see McGushin 1994: 237-44 and La Penna and Funari 2015: 381-87), Just. 38.3.7, Flor. 1.40.20.
[220] Dio Cass. 37.11.1, App. *Mith.* 109 [518-520], Plut. *Pomp.* 41, Florus 1.40.25-26, Vell. Pat. 2.18.1, Mayor, 2010: 2, McGing 2009: 204, Hind 1996 (*CAH*2/9): 129.
[221] Cic. *Leg. Man.* 7, *Pro Mur*. 32-34.
[222] On the issue, see Mayor 2009: 165-66.

image and informed his political choices. The promise of a solid economic policy, the ability to appeal to Greeks and Asians, the idea that the East was a unity, made him, in the eyes of the eastern population, the ideal candidate to rule over Asia.[223] Understanding Mithridates' image is essential because of its extensive use of the memory of Achaemenid Persia, for the role it would play in shaping Sulla's strategy after reconquering Asia and its repercussions in the feud between Pompey and Lucullus.

Mithridates' economic policy

The first reason for Mithridates' success in 88 BCE was his economic policy. The role of financial matters in the shaping of the events leading up to the First Mithridatic War has been often studied. After the revolt of Aristonicus (ended in 129 BCE) and the provisions of Gaius Gracchus, the province of Asia and some neighbouring areas (Phrygia for example) were made subject to taxation and this led to an increased pressure of tax collectors on local economies. The problem built up relatively slowly over time but, judging by the actions of the governor of Asia Quintus Mucius Scaevola and his *legatus* Rutilius Rufus, by 98-97 BCE the situation must have reached a point in which some measures had to be taken. The main problem they had to address, it appears, was the arrogance of the *publicani.* Since they counted on the backing of the Roman governors to get away with their wrongdoing, by enforcing diligently the law and by inflicting punishment when justice demanded, Scaevola and Rufus, managed to restrain the rapacity of the tax-farming corporations. However, although some of the positive

[223] A very popular explanation of the attitude of the Asians towards Mithridates was hatred for Rome (Cicero *Pro Flacco* 60-61, Appian (*Mith.* 23 [91], App. *Mith.* 58 [236-237], see Thornton 1998). Amiotti 1980 believes that the Greeks of Asia, not the Asians, hated Rome. Other factors mentioned by ancient and modern writers are: fickleness of the Asian Greeks (Cicero *Pro Flacco* 61), fear of / obedience to Mithridates (Kallet-Marx 1995: 154-57), taxation and the promises of Mithridates (Thornton 1998).

consequences of their actions lasted beyond the end of their mandate, their actions proved to be insufficient and soon quarrels resurfaced.[224]

To make matters worse, in addition to (and probably also because of) taxation, the misdemeanours of the tax-collectors and their impunity there was a profound crisis of eastern economy. Almost every document that deals with the events of the period alludes to revenues, financial issues and to the evident discontent and exasperation they caused.[225] This was something that the senate and the ruling elite at Rome were perfectly aware of and failed to deal with.[226]

Since taxation and unfair treatment were perceived as a consequence of the expansion of Rome, Mithridates had an easy task: he made Roman greed a central constituent of his propaganda and promised to improve the well-being and prosperity of the Greek cities of Asia.[227] But he did not confine himself to criticism against the invaders' lust for land and riches; he acted. He had already started to infiltrate the economy of Greek Anatolia by issuing a series of golden tetradrachms that adopted models (such as the 'Alexander type', which present on the versus Dionysian or Apollinean symbols) better compatible with the more Hellenized cities of the area than the copper coins of Pontic type (see *infra*) minted in Amisus and Sinope.[228] These issues represent

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[224] Kallet-Marx 1995: 138-148. An example of quarrel: Prienes, cf. Kallet-Marx 1995: 147, with bibliography.
[225] Lintott (*CAH*2/12) 1994: 34-36 cf. Diod. Sic. 37.5-6.
[226] Economy played a determinant role in the Social Wars (App. *BC* 1.7 [30] with Gabba 1994 (*CAH*2/9): 104-109). It was the First Mithridatic War, however, that made clear to the ruling elite the dangers of inadequate management of the conquered lands. The point is made by Cicero. (Cic. *Leg. Man.* 14-16 and 19 – also *Leg. Agr.* II 83. On the financial aspect of the speech: Lintott 2008: 427-30, Rose 1995: 378, Steel 2001: 130. On 88 in the speech: Torelli 1986: 20-21, 9, Narducci 2009: 137. Also, Vasaly 2002: 107-8, Usher 2008: 46. Financial issues after 88 BCE, see *Verr.* 2.3.46-47, 2.3.207, 2.5, also Frazel, 2009: 210-13, 132 and Griffin, 2008: 107).
[227] As we can infer from Sulla's speeches in which the Roman general claims twice that the king of Pontus had promised to promote the well-being and prosperity of the Greek cities (Appian *Mithr.* 57 [231-235] and 62 [253-257]).
[228] Erciyas 2006: 119.

Mithridates as a Hellenized king and include a twofold economic message. On the one hand, they show the intention of Pontus to become a protagonist of Mediterranean commerce; on the other, they depict Mithidates as wealthy and in control of a solid and reliable economy. Once in control of the territory he made some substantial reforms which promoted the unification of economy and urban organization and implemented demagogic measures such as tax exemption.[229] Although we have no strong evidence of this, Mithridates' administration of justice seems to have been swift as well, whereas the process by which a city could ask the senate to decide on a dispute was by no means rapid and included costly and time-consuming journeys to Rome.[230] It does not come as a surprise that he was welcomed by several towns especially those which were in dire financial straits and had seen the activity of Roman money-lenders. [231]

Mithridates, the Greeks and the Asians

The second trump card of Mithridates was the ability to connect to the Greeks and his oriental subjects. Well-aware of the liminality of his kingdom, Mithridates strove 'to show that Pontus was civilized member of the Greek world' and to send out the image of a Hellenized king.[232] As early as 115 BCE, he started to make himself visible to the Greeks of Asia and to do so he did what all the Hellenistic monarchs had done before him with the same purpose: he turned to *euergetism*. He built monuments at Delos, at Rhodes and

[229] Just. 38.3.9. Cf. Erciyas 2006: 175-82.
[230] Kallet-Marx 1995:147-48.
[231] Hind 1996 (*CAH*2/9): 147. Greed was a very popular explanation for the discontent in the East and illustrates very well the extent to which the problem of money was perceived as paramount by all the protagonists (*Syb. Or.* 3.350-355, Just 38.7.8, Diodorus 37.5, Livy *Per.* 70, Cic. *Leg. Man*. 65, *Pro Flac*. 8.19; App. *Mith.* 16 [56] and 21 [81], with McGing 1984: 105-6). The Romans in Justin and in the *Epistula Mithridatis* are robbers (38.4.2 and *Hist.* 4.69.17M), rapacious and greedy (38.6.6 and *Hist.* 4.69.5M).
[232] McGing 1986: 89.

Chios.[233] He also paraded his interest in Greek culture, especially medicine, and hosted philosophers and historians at his court.[234] Moreover, in his self-stylization as a Hellenistic monarch Eupator associated himself with Heracles and stressed his connection with Alexander.[235] Finally, as Antiochus had done, he recycled the well-known theme of the freedom of the Greeks. Along with the Hellenistic element he stressed his Asian background in various ways, for example, by spreading myths that brought out his Persian descent and by venerating Iranian deities.[236]

The crucial factor, however, was his ability to appeal to both the Asians and the Greeks at the same time. How careful and able Eupator was at projecting a positive mixed image is detectable in almost every field in which he operated. Legends of Asiatic origin and astral inspiration about his birth and upbringing began to circulate very early and we find clear allusions to them on coins minted in the Hellenized cities of Pontus which bear, on the obverse a comet and, on the reverse, a flying Pegasus. The use of a comet has almost certainly Asiatic origins. Pegasus, on the other hand, is a mythological animal with a strong connection with the myth of Perseus, the hero who better represented the integration between East and West and who was particularly significant for, and revered by, the royal house of Pontus.[237] Thus, here we see how the perfectly Asian myth is mixed

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[233] On the inscriptions from Rhodes and Chios Ballesters-Pastor 1996: 156n25, 296n28, 432. On Delos: Kreuz 2009: 131-144.
[234] McGing 1986: 89-94, Pliny *NH* 25.2.5.
[235] On Mithridates and Alexander on coins: McGing 1986: 101, Højte 2009: 148-50, cf. SNG-BM 1037-43. On actions that mirror actions of Alexander App. *Mith.* 20 [77] and 89 [407-408], 117 [571-578], Strabo 12.8.18 [578], 14.1.23) On his claim to be the descendent of Alexander McGing 1986: 13 text and n2 for references. On Mithridates and Heracles, see McGing 1986: 96 and 99-101, Højte 2009: 151.
[236] Justin – 37.2, discussed in McGing 1986: 44-47. He worshipped Iranian gods (Appian *Mith.* 66 [276-279], 70 [295]) and claimed to be the descendent of Cyrus (McGing 1986: 13 text and n1 for references).
[237] McGing 1986: 95. Pegasus, Perseus and other mythological figures related to their legend (Medusa, Athena, the image of a sheathed sword) were used both on royal and civic coins (Erciyas 2006: 118). On coins with Pegasus and Perseus: McGing 1986: 95-97, Gaggero 1977: 91-102.

with the Hellenic element to target a specific group of Greeks (those living around the Black Sea).

In the religious sphere, Mithridates chose carefully what deities he wanted to be associated with. All of them show the remarkable quality of being easily adapted to an eastern and western audience. The Greek element could identify with the claims to divinity and the association of the king with Dionysus, Heracles, Perseus, and Zeus. The cult of Attis and Mēn-Pharnakou, deities in many ways connected to rebirth and vegetation, and easily associable to Dionysus, would appeal to the resident population and local community of Phrygian and Anatolian origin. The Persian element of ambivalent gods such as Zeus Stratios, would appeal to the subjects of Iranian origin and bolster the claims of Achaemenid descent.[238] This network of symbols is very well summarised by the ubiquitous presence on royal coins of the crescent and star, a Persian and Zoroastrian symbol of victory over darkness but also a feature easily linked to Dionysus, Mēn, Mithras, and Ahura-Mazda along with a series of coins issued from the cities of Amisos, Chabatka and Amastris presenting the star and crescent in association with the myth of Perseus and Dionysus.[239]

We have another example of how carefully the image of Eupator was crafted, how much he had a keen eye on self-promotion and a good knowledge of the Greek mindset in his handling of his lineage. Although he made great display of his Persian ancestry (and in doing so he was undoubtedly targeting his Asian subjects), to avoid the contradiction

[238] Mēn-Pharnakou (Saprykin 2009: 259-60), Zeus Stratios (Saprykhin 2009: 256-58, rituals Appian *Mith.* 66 [276-279], 70 [295] and Strabo (15.3.14 [732-733]). There has been some divergence in the interpretation of this cult. On survival of Iranian cults in Pontus see Boyce and Grenet 1991: 262-304 and the short but recent and very complete discussion of the issue (with more examples) of Canepa 2017: 217-19.

[239] Erciyas 2006: 119-21, Saprykin 2009: 252.

that being a philhellene and descendant of the Achaemenids and Alexander would entail in the eyes of his Hellenic subjects, he distanced himself from discredited Persian kings (especially Xerxes) and went back to the those who had a ‘good name’: Darius and, more importantly, Cyrus.[240] Similarly, while boasting his descent from Alexander, he took care to use symbols that emphasised his belonging to both worlds. For example, we know of portraits of Mithridates in the guise of Alexander on coins and of statues representing him in a fashion strongly reminiscent of Alexander-Hercules.[241] We also know of anecdotes about the youth of the king, whose diffusion was surely encouraged by the court, that combine the Persian tradition and the story of Alexander the Great.[242] This combination of Achaemenid and Alexandrian elements, dovetails perfectly with the third, and most sophisticated, point of Mithridates’ propaganda which targets an even wider audience than his subjects in Pontus and the Greeks of Asia: the unity of Asia and who has the right to rule over it.

Unity of Asia.

One of the earliest forms of response to the victories of Rome in the East was the adaptation of pre-existing prophecies the main motive of which is the revenge of Asia

[240] On Cyrus as the figure that had the best reputation in the West, was well known, conferred prestige and legitimacy and could stay next to his Hellenising claims (e.g. Alexandrian / Macedonian lineage) see: Lerouge 2017.
[241] The most famous portrait of Mithridates (and the only one that has been identified with him without doubt) is the one with the *exuviae* in the Louvre (cat.: MA 2321; Smith 1988: 99). A case has been made for the identification of Mithridates with the statue of Heracles liberating Prometheus discovered at Pergamum (MgGing 1986: 100). It is worth mentioning that the torturer of Prometheus was the eagle of Zeus and the eagle is also the symbol of the Roman legions. If the identification of the baby Telephus with Mithridates in the group representing a bearded Hercules holding the infant discovered near the site of the garden of Pompey at Largo Argentina should prove correct (Andreae 1994-1995, Andreae 1997, Mayor 2009: 63) and if we can give some credence to the reports that Pompey deviated to the East while campaigning in Armenia to visit the place where Prometheus had lain bound, we would have a very interesting response from Pompey to the claims of Mithridates.
[242] Just. 37.2.1-3. On the passage as mythology: Reinach 1890: 51n2; contra: Mayor 2009: 27-33.

over Rome led by an Asian king.[243] The most famous preserved example is the fragment of Antisthenes of Rhodes dated to the period immediately after the war between Antiochus III and Rome.[244] Works of this kind seem to have proliferated in Asia in the second century BCE. The most representative example are the *Sibylline Oracles*. This is a collection of violently anti-Roman oracular utterances which offer an elaboration of the concept encapsulated in the Antisthenes fragment and predict that a king from the East will be sent by god to lead the Asians.[245] Under his leadership, the whole of Asia, enslaved by Rome, will rise and 'three time as much money … shall take back again from Rome, paying back her destructive arrogance. And as many Asians as were enslaved in Italian homes, twenty times this number of Italians shall toil in poverty in Asia and shall pay back their debt ten thousand-fold'.[246] These texts suited Mithridates' propaganda so well that it is very likely that the more anti-Roman sections were composed during the Mithridatic Wars, possibly at the instigation of the royal court.[247] We know that the king of Pontus profited from this kind of literature, at least in one case during the first Mithridatic War because Posidonius states that Athenion, the tyrant of Athens who would lead the resistance against Sulla, had used 'prophecies' to convince the Athenians to side with Mithridates in 88.[248] Although we do not know precisely what the prophecies used by

[243] See Porqueddu Salvioli 1982.
[244] *FGrH* 63 30.5.6. It contains an anti-Roman prophecy that well represents the desire of vengeance of the Etolians and Syrians after the defeat of Antiochus III.
[245] Anti-Roman: *Or. Syb* 3 46-62, 350-360, 464-469; king from the East: *Or. Syb* 3.652-656.
[246] *Syb. Or.* 3.351-355. Translation from McGing 1986: 105.
[247] Geffcken 1902: 8-9 has attributed these lines to the Mithridatic Wars. Tarn (1932: 135-37) thinks more after Actium but Amiotti (1982) believes they may have been written under Mithridates and re-used under Cleopatra. For general discussion, dates and place of origin: Buitenwerf 2003: 126-33 and 221-23. Oracles and Mithridatic propaganda: McGing 1986: 102-08, Amiotti 1982, Rizzo 1980, Russo 2009, Sanford 1937, Ballesteros-Pastor 2013: 61-62.
[248] For more reasons for this identification, as, for example, thematic analogies as the role of the eastern king in bringing back *omonoia* (*ομόνοια*), see Amiotti 1982: 19-20.

Athenion were, it is plausible that the oracles he used could have been, or at least must have reflected closely, some passages in the third book of the *Sibylline Oracles.*[249]

In addition to the display of anti-Roman sentiments, the interesting aspect of these texts is the use of Asia as an umbrella-term for all the inhabitants of the Near East, without ethnic distinctions.[250] This idea may well have developed independently and reflect a process of integration between the Asian and Greek cultural elements, possibly developed as a reaction to Rome's success in gaining control everywhere. It also shows the difficulty (or lack of interest) of Rome in finding a common background with the inhabitants of Asia and Anatolia.[251] What matters, however, is that it became instrumental to the identification of Mithridates with the liberator of Asia.

The concept of Asia as a unity of Greek and oriental elements as a key point for Mithridates' self-legitimization appears again in two documents written in Latin.[252] We can see Mithridates integrating the hope of vengeance against Rome brought by the Asian king which we find in the Oracles with a well-known anti-Roman theme inherited from Perseus, Demetrius and Antiochus III – that is, the hatred of the Romans for kings – and combining it with issues of legitimacy based on lineage.

The first document is Mithridates' speech in Justin / Trogus.[253] The *Epitome* reports a speech that Mithridates supposedly delivered to his army to inflame and exhort

[249] Amiotti 1980: 19-20.
[250] This is not completely surprising because the elaboration of these texts was the result of the merging of Asian and Greek traditions. Cf. Amiotti 1982, McGing 1986: 103. It may be interesting to note that the associations with Hercules, Alexander also points to the idea of liberator of Asia from Rome (Cic. *pro Flac.* 60, McGing 1986: 99). When in 87 a comet crossed the sky of Asia again it was almost inevitable that the onlookers would take it as a sign from the heavens. Mithridates the man born under a comet was the king of Asia who would get rid of the western invader as the prophecies foretold (Mayor 2009: 27-37).
[251] On Rome's eastern policy and lack of interest in Asia see Sordi 1982, Derow 2003: 68, McGing 2003: 76-77, Ferrary 1998: 817-25.
[252] Livy 44.24.1, Just. 29.2.4, Livy 37.25.5.
[253] 38.4-6.

them. His point is that the war against the Romans is just, because he, like the other Hellenistic kings and, ultimately, the whole of Asia, is a victim of their greed. He also suggests that monarchy is the right type of government for those lands and he is, obviously, the most suitable candidate for the role. The idea that Asia is composed of a group of lands unified by the common enemy, informs the entire passage.[254] Justin, introducing the speech, says that Mithridates had 'armed the whole of the East against the Romans'.[255] When Mithridates compares himself to the Romans, to make sure that his listeners would perceive that he is at the end of a long line of distinguished rulers of all Asia, he names his ancestors who are also the founders of the empires that unified Asia (the Persian Kings Cyrus and Darius and the Macedonian kings). Then he suggests that he will enlarge those empires by adding lands that had not been conquered in the past to which he can claim a right because, he points out, Cappadocia, Pontus, Bithynia, Armenia had never been ruled by non-autochthone dynasties and *he is* autochthone.[256] The Mithridates of Justin / Trogus can offer an answer to all the variety of needs of all Asia: lineage, kingship, ethnic stability and generosity. Not freedom or puppet kings.[257]

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[254] An inscription from Caria (RC 73/74) reports the orders issued by Mithridates to his 'satrap' Leonippus to capture an individual (Chaermon of Nysa) who had supported the 'common enemy' (viz. the Romans; RC 74 lines 6-7; on Romans as common enemy: cf. Santangelo 2007: 55n22, Erskine 1994: 81-82 and Robert 1969: 59 on Rome as 'common benefactor' Wehrli 1978 and Erskine 1994. Cf. Ballesteros-Pastor 2009: 217).

[255] 38.3.7 *omnemque Orientem adversus Romanos armat*.

[256] 38.7.2-3. After mentioning the wealth of Asia and the fact that the people there cannot suffer the rapacity, fraudulence and greed of the Romans (they are wolves 38.6.8) and are awaiting his arrival, he explains that his intentions are not to storm the land but to live there, he makes clear that he is munificent and that this is one of the reasons for his success. (38.7.8). In addition, he points out that legitimate kings, by lineage or right of conquest (ethnic and political motives), are overthrown by the Romans in disregard of any right (*iure gentium* 38.5.6). He explains that the hatred of Rome for kings derives from the wickedness of their kings who are a hotchpotch of men from the most various backgrounds (38.6.7). And this creates a sharp contrast with the substantial lineage of the king of Pontus (38.7.1).

[257] 38.6.1-6 and 38.8.10. Antiochus had made analogous considerations when he contended that he had the right to occupy the Chersonese because they had belonged to his ancestors, but Mithridates' case is much stronger.

In the *Epistula Mithridatis* Sallust has Mithridates insisting on the aggressive nature of the Romans and their unnatural (and evil) love for war, on their lack of lineage, and alluding twice to the Roman custom of 'overthrowing all monarchies' and their hostility towards kings.[258] In short, the Romans are the opposite of what their subjects want: the Asians want a just king (*iustos dominos*) while Rome is a different master, one who is only interested in plundering and looting.[259] As in Justin's speech, Asia emerges unified by the aversion for Rome. Since the victims of the *cupido imperii* (5) are all those who enter in contact with Rome: 'free cities', kings and their subjects, it follows that even those who prefer freedom will find in kings a better alternative, since Rome's presence is nothing but 'heavy servitude' (*grave servitium* 11). Sallust's Mithridates seems to know very well the difference between the Asians and the Greeks and to be aware that a good king should behave accordingly. Thus, he conquers and occupies Asia which wants to have a master but frees Greece (11).[260]

To conclude, Mithridates success lay in what he had to offer to Asia: promises of prosperity and freedom from Romans taxation, freedom for the Greeks and a ruler who could claim to be the rightful ruler of Asia because, differently from the Romans who are greedy barbarians of mixed origin who hate kings, he has an impeccable lineage that goes

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[258] 15 and 17 *Pestem conditos orbis terrarum*, … *omniaque non serva et maxime regna hostilia.* The interesting point is the implicit reason given for Romans' hatred for kings: they present an alternative more appealing to most of the people who prefer royal rule since it is based on justice (few men desire freedom (*libertatem*), the greater part are 'content with just masters' (*iustos dominos volunt* 18)). With this Mirthidates suggests that the freedom given by Rome is only a limited kind of freedom, freedom from the rule of a king.

[259] The kings Mithridates has in mind are different from the Romans: they are rich (as Arsaces) while the Romans have nothing (17), are just, while the Romans are duplicitous (*amicitias simulantem* 5, *callidi et repertores perfidiae* 7), own riches (16, 19) and do not take them away (*spoliatus est* 6, *asiam deripere* 9) from the subjects.

[260] The *Epistula Mithridatis* and the speech in Trogus are documents not easy to interpret. Issues of audience, authorship and historical plausibility complicate the picture. On these and other difficulties see Adler 2011: 15-58.

back to Alexander and Darius I, and he is attentive to the needs of both Asians and Greeks, rich and generous.

What is striking and peculiar to Eupator, thus, is the effort put into creating a figure that could be read in both ways and in exploiting this to his advantage. These were conscious creations which testify, on the one hand to the importance of the Iranian influence on the Pontic house and, on the other to how careful Eupator was in projecting a positive mixed image.[261] The second remarkable aspect is the inability of Rome, who had very well understood the desires of the Greeks and used them to their advantage, to grasp and adapt to the situation of the Near East, a shortcoming that even Roman authors seem to have perceived – just a little too late.[262]

The question is then, what are the consequences of the encounter with such complex and effective ideology that combines skilful manipulation of Hellenistic kingship, elaboration of the myth of Alexander and appropriation of the memory of Achaemenid Persia, with the purpose of promoting unity within the Asian world?[263]

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[261] McGing 1986: 46.

[262] The imbalance towards the Greek world in Mithridates' policy is only apparent and does not represent a definitive proof of Hellenistic leanings. Authors writing in a Hellenized context would naturally have emphasised the Hellenistic flavour of the tales. Coins, especially gold and silver tetradrachms and *stateres*, were for their nature meant to circulate in the Mediterranean, where commerce was much more developed than in the area of the Black Sea, and therefore it is reasonable that they followed Hellenistic precedents. It is because we can see only the Greek reception of these symbols that they appear to be aimed at a Greek rather than at an oriental public. It might be useful to compare the case of Pontus with the roughly contemporary example of assimilation of eastern and western religion with ideological and political purposes that can be found in the monuments and inscriptions of Antiochus of Commagene. Here we can see the presence of a mixed pantheon which, through assimilation, appropriation and syncretism, appeals to easterners and westerners alike (Jacobs 2002, Facella 2006: 279-85, 287, 296; Versluys 2017: 111-37, esp. 135-37, very important the considerations about the juxtaposition of Persian and Greek elements in Hellenistic Commagene in Versluys 2017: 207-19). In the case of Antiochus the means are different but the message and imagery used to convey it is analogous to Mithridates' own.

[263] His propaganda was very sophisticated and calculated (McGing 1986: 89-107). The long-lasting influence of the Persian tradition in Anatolian culture (detectable even in the imperial period) is examined by Sergueenkiva and Rojas 2017; see also Shayegan 2016: 8-22.

3. Sulla and Lucullus

Sulla and the Mithridatic inheritance.

Impressive as it might have been, the success of Mithridates did not last long after his seizure of Asia and the events of 88 BCE. In 87, immediately after Sulla had crossed the Adriatic Sea, the Greeks declared allegiance to Rome and only Athens remained on the side of the king of Pontus.[264] After staunch resistance, the city was captured and looted, many citizens were massacred while the survivors were deprived of the right to vote, but, according to Appian, Sulla then pardoned the city and restored the 'laws she had before'. The precise meaning of these words is unclear and has led to different interpretation of the legislative acts of Sulla but it seems safe to say that the revolt of Athens was treated as a self-contained and exceptional episode and that the attitude of Rome towards the city did not change radically after the first Mithridatic War.[265] Asia would pose a much more challenging problem.

In military terms it was an easy job. Mithridates was easily pushed back to Pontus and forced to accept conditions at Dardanus. Sulla had proved that the Pontic army could not withstand the military superiority of his legions but it was clear that he was not welcomed. In fact, if it is true that even before Sulla signed the treaty with the king of Pontus it is likely that part of the enthusiasm of those who in some important cities had supported Mithridates had vanished, it is also true that several other cities resisted the Romans even after the king had returned to his homeland. These pockets of resistance, whether out of loyalty towards Mithridates or out of fear of Rome's retaliation, were

[264] Plut *Sull.* 12.1, App. *Mith.* 30 [116-119].
[265] App. *Mith.* 38-39 [147-153], quote: 39 [152]. On the issue: Kallet-Marx 1995: 219-20, Santangelo 2007: 40-44 and Mastrocinque 1999: 183n95.

easily done away with (with the exception of Mytilene, which resisted until 81/80 BCE).[266] Asia was now under the control of Sulla but it must have been clear to him that force alone would not be enough to restore the supremacy of Rome over Asia and prevent further upheavals.

Sulla must have taken this into account when he decided not to distribute collective punishment for the events of 88. Against the leaders of the cities summoned at Ephesus Sulla did not exert revenge but levelled a different accusation: Mithridatism.[267] In the speech reported by Appian Sulla makes clear that the main responsibility of the Asians is that they broke faith with the Romans not the slaughter of the Italians, which is a consequence and 'only' the most evident symptom of this betrayal.[268] He emphasises that punishing disloyalty towards Rome is more important than exacting vengeance, for this reason he requests 'only' a massive fine to compensate Rome for the damage produced by the revolt of Asia.[269] The ostensible reason for this 'mildness' becomes immediately clear. Sulla notes that the individuals who had led the massacre and the most eminent partisans of Mithridates had been put to death, and then suggests that the cities of Asia had, for the greatest part, already received their punishment for the crime of killing the Italians when Mithridates had, in turn, betrayed them and given freedom to the slaves, redistributed the land and made populist reforms.[270] However, for those who can read between the lines there is a second message that Sulla conveys to his audience with his speech; namely that he and Rome

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[266] Mytilene see Plut. *Luc*. 4.2-3.

[267] Strabo 13.1.66 [614] reports of a supporter of the king who was 'accused of Mithriadatizing'.

[268] It has been suggested that the speech may reflect one contained in Sulla's *Memoirs* (cf. Badian 1964: 228-29 who argues that Appian used the *Memoirs* of Sulla extensively). For discussion of the problem see Cornell 2013: 286.

[269] App. *Mith.* 62-63 [253-260], Plut. *Sull.* 25.2.

[270] Appian *Mith.* 61 [252-252], Kallet-Marx 1995: 266.

are different from Mithridates. They do not act as barbarians, make empty promises, slaughter indiscriminately and free slaves.[271] They are civilized, the true philhellenes. It is not mere rhetoric: Sulla's acts are consistent with the words reported by Appian. True, many previously autonomous cities were incorporated under the Roman rule and several lost privileges and autonomy but Sulla did not change the model for Roman encroachment in Asia, he did not go for a full administrative reorganization of the region, nor did he try to revolutionize the structure of the province and surrounding areas. He had a different plan: to exploit the financial difficulties of Asia.[272] In the speech, Sulla insists on the economic advantages brought by Rome. He first emphasises that Romans had intervened in Asia when Antiochus was despoiling the Asians. Second, when he suggests that the Asians revolted against the Romans because their prosperity had made them become too arrogant, he explicitly mentions that opulence had been gained thanks to Roman's protection. He, then, goes on to remark that the Romans are not accustomed to sponsor revolutionary political or economic reforms that alter the distribution of wealth and of political power suggesting thereby that the acts of Mithridates (freeing slaves and cancellation of debts) caused not only social mayhem but also difficulties to the economy. The conclusion is twofold. On the one hand the speech is a perfect counterweight to Mithridates' propaganda: it denies the rapacity of the Romans, it casts Mithridates in the position of the disruptor of constituted order and of the mendacious. On the other, it suggests that it is only thanks to Sulla's intervention that the status quo and prosperity will be restored.

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[271] On Mithridates' purges, massacres and freeing of slaves see App. *Mith.* 46-48 [177-193].

[272] The lack of major changes in the structure of the government of Asia was not imposed by haste because he was pressed by urgent problems at Rome as often suggested (on Sulla's unexplained lingering in Asia, see Sherwin-White 1984: 146) but was part of a well calculated strategy.

It is unlikely that Sulla and his entourage did not realize that the issuing of a fine would have deepened the economic crisis the cities were already suffering before the breaking off of the hostilities, which had been one of the factors that prompted them to support Mithridates. Since economic difficulties had thrown the Asians into the arms of Mithridates and since the main point of reference for the occupying power remained the same (the cities and their elites),[273] with the king out of the picture, and the economic situation unchanged, Sulla must have thought there was only one choice left to the provincials: to find another champion. It is quite probable that, at least in the beginning, Sulla himself was the 'patron' to go to (Cic. *Off.* 3.87) but is likely that what he had in mind was a solution good not only for the short but also for the mid-term. It cannot be coincidental, then, that the 'elites of the cities' summoned at Ephesus, as Sulla admits, are the same group of people on whom Mithridates had previously relied.[274] It is unlikely that Mithridates had managed to do what he did without a considerable support of the local aristocracy. It is reasonable to think, therefore, that the social strategy should have been roughly the same for both contenders. The difference is that Mithridates may have tried to unite the poor and the rich, so to speak, under the hatred for Rome by suggesting that it would have been advantageous for both to get rid of the invader. Sulla went straight to the privileged class. Sulla the patron had replaced Mithridates the benefactor.[275]

[273] Santangelo 2007: 66.

[274] On the consequences of Sulla's rearrangement, the fine, the strategy of Sulla and the economic situation of Asia, cf. Santangelo 2007: 127-29).

[275] That Sulla had decided to adopt a solution modelled on that of his enemy is less surprising than it can be imagined. He had been attentive to the movements of Mithridates and ready to respond to his press initiatives. This is detectable in the adoption of the names '*epaphroditos*' and '*felix*' and in the coinage (Hind 1994 (*CAH2/9*): 163-64, Gisborne 2005: 115-16). On the attempt to unite lower and high classes and its background, Rizzo 1980: 191. On the use of patronage to bond local elites: Badian 1958: 74, Rich 1989: 122-23; see also the inscriptions pledging loyalty to Rome dedicated by eastern cities on the Capitolium collected by Degrassi 1951-52: 19-47.

The remodelling of the relationship with the provincials of Asia on the pattern that had been successful at Athens and in conformity to the model set by Mithridates, in the long run would turn out not to be as successful as expected.[276] However, it would bring Rome in touch with Asian culture with notable consequences. Greeks from Asia would arrive more frequently at Rome while Greek-Asian wealth and culture would reach Rome in unseen quantity. But, more importantly, Sulla offered a model of behaviour; from now on, generals in the East would have to adopt a strategy for government and for military action mindful of the complex mix of ethnicities, politics and historical background that characterizes the reality of Asia. There would not be individuals pinned against eastern rulers but individuals who, busy dealing with a composite world that had to be kept under control, would be seen, from the distorted perspective of Rome, as either being seduced by or exploiting, the 'wicked' East. In Lucullus, the epigone of Sulla, both aspects are combined.[277]

Lucullus

Lucius Licinius Lucullus was from a distinguished senatorial family. He had been one of the favourites of Sulla, had reached the highest magistracy in 74 BCE, immediately after Sulla's death, and had defended the measures passed by his mentor. He had spent most of his adult life in the army first in Italy under Sulla, then, between 88 and 81 BCE, as his aide in Greece and Asia Minor, and finally in 74, after a period in Rome, he was back in Anatolia where he would spend another eight years (from August 74 to his return to

[276] We will see that Antony will return to the Asians a proper king although only in name, something the Romans could not supply. Augustus will make a further step, he would 'replace Cleopatra and Cesario as the formal overlord of a vassal state system' (Strootman 2010: 157).
[277] There is a long story of difficult relations between kings and the Romans rich with episodes in which the Kings are treated disparagingly by ambassadors or commanders, cf. Gisborne 2005.

Rome in 66 BCE) fighting Mithridates and his son-in-law Tigranes. A long period of service (around 21 years), a good part spent (fifteen years) in the East, between Asia and Greece.[278] It may not come as a complete surprise then that he had a good relationship with Greeks and Asians, possibly better than the one he had with the Romans.

Haughty, distant and unfortunate, he was not loved by his men, as the mutiny of the troops in Armenia prove.[279] He was not more loved at Rome where it would take him three years and the help of Cicero, to overcome the opposition of the people to concede him a triumph and where even his natural allies seem to have mixed feelings about him.[280] However, the opposite applies to his relationship with the Greeks. Throughout his permanence in the East, the Greeks showed their sympathies towards him. During his first campaign in Greece and Anatolia he was honoured at Chaeroneia, Hypata (Greece), Synanda (Phrigia) and Thyateira (Lydia) with statues describing him as a benefactor.[281] At least one statue was erected to him at Delos (*CIL* I^2 714). Surely, he did everything he could to gain the favour of the Hellenes. He treated them with mildness even when they may not have deserved so, he showed moderation towards the heavily Hellenised cities of Pontus of Sinope and Amisus where he first tried to reduce to the minimum the plunder and massacre and then promoted their reconstruction after the end of the siege.[282] His administrative work in Asia, in particular the reorganization of the province of Asia in great difficulty because of debts, testifies to his generous attitude, a detail that

[278] Keaveney 1992: 117.
[279] His eastern campaign is rich in episodes of friction with his men and lieutenants: the episodes of Appius Claudius Pulcher and the revolt in Armenia in 68 BCE (Keaveney 2009: 180), and the events of Amisus (Keaveney 2009: 116-18) are good examples.
[280] For example, before supporting his request of triumph Cicero contributed to torpedo his command; Cato gave him his niece as wife but attacked him in a public speech, more on this *infra*.
[281] Plut. *Sulla* 11, *Cim*. 1-2, Keaveney 2009: 212n11.
[282] On Lucullus freeing cities of Asia Minor cf. App. *Mith.* 83 (370-374), on Amisus and the precedent of Sulla cf. Plut. *Luc.* 19.2-8, Keaveney 2009: 124-25 and Sherwin-White 1994 (*CAH2*/9): 246.

is duly remarked on by Plutarch.[283] He was not less well-disposed towards the barbarians (pace Keaveney, who believes he used a double standard: mild with Greeks, not so much with the barbarians).[284] The generosity he showed towards the people deported by Tigrane at Tigranocerta (Greeks and barbarians from Adiabene, Gordyene, Assiria and Cappadocia) would pay-off when Arabians, Gordyans, Sophenians submitted to him, as Plutarch says 'on account of respect for him and his moderation'.[285]

We must admit that we cannot say with certainty what the intentions of Lucullus were. Although personal inclinations may have played a part, his conciliatory attitude to Asians and Greeks alike was also surely the product of shrewd calculation. In the far-away land of Armenia, with limited resources and men, it was essential to weaken the resources of Tigranes and deprive the King of Kings of allies (this would also have had the considerable advantage to undermine the ability of the king of Armenia to help his father-in-law). In Pontus, where the Greek communities represented the most obvious base of power for Rome, the events had shown clearly that it was not enough to defeat Eupator in battle and that reliance only on the Greek element was not a riskless policy. After all *both* ethnic groups had shown a remarkable loyalty to Mithridates; evidently, the effort he had made to build his image (and that of the Romans) and to obtain the trust and loyalty of his subjects had not been a waste of time. Whether out of personal sympathy or cold calculation, finding friends among the Greeks and among the barbarians was

[283] *Luc.* 20.6. On the consequences of Sulla's settlement, see Plut. *Luc.* 20.1-3.
[284] Keaveney 2009: 124.
[285] Plut. *Luc.* 29.4-10 with 26.1 *Luc.* 29.6-10.

surely a sound strategy and this is exactly what Lucullus did (and the opportunistic element of this strategy is perfectly understood by Plutarch).[286]

It is undoubtable that Philo-eastern leanings—true or pretended—were useful in Asia and helped Lucullus a great deal in his campaign. However, they also proved to be a double edged sword and, after his return to Rome in 66 BCE, Lucullus' attitude towards the Greeks of Asia and the barbarians was used against him in the context of his political rivalry with Pompey to suggest that he had 'gone native' and become Greek or, perhaps even worse, Persianized.

Well before 66 BCE, his enemy had already started sharpening their swords. While he was still embroiled in the Armenian War, the tribune Gabinus had proposed and obtained that the province of Bithynia and Pontus be assigned to Acilius Glabrio. We can only conjecture whether this was the result of a scheme devised by Pompey or an attempt of Glabrio and his supporters to snatch the prize of victory from Lucullus, but Lucullus surely was the target of this attack.[287] Then, the tribune Manilus proposed a law that would give the sole command against Mithridates to Pompey and Cicero delivered a speech to the people of Rome in support of the law and endorsing Lucullus' recall.

The *Pro Lege Manilia* well exemplifies the tenor of the arguments used against Lucullus. Although the main justification that Cicero gives is 'an old precedent' (*vetere exemplo* 26) 'that a limit should be set to a long command', the main argument used to

[286] Plut. *Luc.* 29.5. The reliability of Plutarch, who frequently insists on Lucullus' philhellenism, may be object of questioning. He may have been inclined emphasise Lucullus philo-Greek leanings, certainly he approved of them. In fact, he identifies the benefits made by him to Chaeronea as the reason for writing the biography. Lucullus' benefits made to all the Greeks are also one of the points of comparison with Cimon (Swain 1995: 259-64).
[287] Pompey: Keaveney, 2009: 120-21, Glabrio: Kallet-Marx 1995: 315.

justify Lucullus' recall was his needless prolonging of the war for his own enrichment.[288] With a speech that is at the same time both very cautious and deliberately ambiguous, Cicero depicts Lucullus as slow, greedy, violent, *impius*, diplomatically inadequate and unaware of the importance of the economic factor in maintaining power and stability at Rome. In section 22-27, he suggests that if the Luculluns had not been so greedy, Mithridates would not have managed to escape capture. He also mentions Lucullus' intentions to pillage a temple, the upheaval of the army which he did not manage to settle, and the return of Mithridates with the help of another king (Tigranes, who was the one who had been attacked by Lucullus!). Cicero places strong emphasis on these last two issues with two calculated *praeteritiones* (24 and 26). He then goes on praising Pompey for his military skills, his luck, his respect for the allies, their money and their possessions and temples (26-48, 64-68). The comparison, not explicit but unmissable, is unforgiving. Lucullus is not the ideal choice in the circumstances. Pompey, by contrast, is the right leader for the Republic in this juncture.[289] In short, Cicero affirms, Mithridates is not unbeatable, the problem lies with the man in charge. The law was passed and Lucullus was recalled.

The inadequacy of Lucullus was not an idea exclusive to Cicero or the result of some machination of Pompey. Even his own natural allies belabour the point. At the trial of Lucius Licinius Murena, where Lucullus was a spectator, the prosecutors, Cato and Sulpicius, must have alluded to Lucullus avidity and lack of vigour in pursuing

[288] Cic. *Leg. Man.* 26 (Grose-Hodge, Loeb), cf.: App. *Mith.* 90 [411-412], Plut. *Luc.* 33.4, Dio 36.2.1. Again, there is a great deal of speculation around this issue (there is a possibility that the *publicani* may have been behind the rumour, but certainly this allegation was widespread and Cicero duly picks it up in his speech).
[289] This is Torelli's reading (1982: 36), similar Steel 2001: 148-54.

Mithridates.[290] He was not spared attacks outside the public arena too. Cicero would criticise him on several occasions, mainly for his lifestyle and lack of political commitment, so would other contemporaries such as Varro.[291]

Thus, in his last years, Lucullus had been the object of attacks from all fronts, but in less than a century his bad reputation would become proverbial. He would be presented as an example of someone who had exceeded in his love for Greek things to the point that his character lost part of his Roman nature. He would become the quintessential decadent aesthete with Plutarch and Pliny as the most convinced advocates.[292] In short, Lucullus would be (partially) responsible for introducing decadent habits into the sober Republican Rome. And with these stories of debauchery and overindulgence would come also allusion to 'Persianization'.

Keaveney blames Cicero for compounding the allegations of inertia, inadequacy and greed with accusations of hedonistic behaviour. He believes this was a 'deliberate misinterpretation' and argues that this misreading was then echoed by various authors

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[290] The contorted passage at 20 makes sense only if intended as an oblique response to an accusation of sluggishness, greed and the fact that Mithridates had dodged all the attempts of the Romans to come to a confrontation in the field. These are the very same charges made against Lucullus in the *Pro Lege Manilia*. What Cicero seems to be doing is to dissociate Murena from the alleged flaws of Lucullus and from his corrupting influence without, at the same time, admitting to the validity of the charge. On the passage, especially Ayres 1954. On the speech, MacKendrick 1995: 75, Adamietz 1996: 2-3, Usher 2008: 59-64, Narducci 2009: 166-170, Craig 1986: 229-39, Rawson 1975: 77-79, Leff 1998: 61-88, Leeman 1982.

[291] *De Legibus* 3.30-31, *Ad Att.* 2.1.7. More moral considerations in *Off.* 1.140. Varro *Rust.* 1.13.7 (Lucullus builds villas at the detriment of the people), 3.4.2-3 (Aviarium at Tusculum), 3.5.8 (big villa at Tusculum), 3.17.9 (villa built without interest for production, only pleasure); fishponds: Varr. *Rust.* 3.3.1 and 3.17.9, *De Vita Populi Romani* fr. 118 (= Pliny *NH* 14.96), 119 and 120 (Pittà 2015: 484-93). It may be point of speculation the extent to which the accusations levelled against Lucullus were based on reality or amplifications. Compare Plut. *Luc.* 17.6-9, App. *Mith.* 82 [367], Memnon *FGH* 30.1, Cic. *Leg. Man.* 22 with Plutarch *Luc.* 15 (cf. Keaveney 2009: 116-22 and 132-34. Although Keaveney seems all too eager to rehabilitate the protagonist of his biography, he is certainly right in noting that the only undoubtable issue is the fact that Mithridates always managed to flee unscathed. This event may have given Lucullus' enemies the excuse they needed.)

[292] Pliny *NH* 28.56, Plutarch *Luc.* 38-43 *passim*.

and finally picked up by Plutarch and consigned to posterity.[293] This explains the strong 'un-Roman' side of his image in the post-Ciceronian literary tradition.[294] However, this does not explain the 'Persianization' of Lucullus. In order to understand how he became a 'satrap' and a 'Xerxes' I would like to discuss another aspect of his 'going native'.[295]

Lucullus was a true philhellene and Cicero praises him for that.[296] Moderate interest for Greece might not have risen criticism, but Republican history is full of examples of Romans who exaggerated their fondness for Hellenic culture, or, to put it another way, whose philo-Greek leanings were used against them in the political contest (Scipio, Marcellus …). Did this happen to Lucullus too?

Even in Plutarch, an author not suspected of hosting anti-Greek feelings, there are clues that point in this direction. Take for example the three anecdotes narrated in chapter 41 of the *Life*. In the first one, Lucullus clarifies to his sensitive Greek guests that his banquet expenses were not made on account of them but 'on account of Lucullus'. In the second, he rebukes a slave for preparing an average meal only because he was dining alone. The third is the famous episode of the dinner in the Apollo room in which Lucullus uses a clever trick to impress his hosts (Pompey and Cicero) with a sumptuous banquet. The first and second episode have one thing in common: Lucullus is very keen to make clear that his expenses are made for his own pleasure, the third emphasises his eagerness

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[293] Keaveney 2009: 209-11. On the afterlife of the *topos* and how it became *exemplum* see Tröster 2008: 66-69. Whether Plutarch and Pliny draw from Cicero also the moral criticism or just the anecdotes is hard to gauge. Keaveney (2009: 210n50) is sceptic.

[294] Velleius Paterculus has Lucullus as the *luxuriae primus actor* (Vell. 2.33.4 with Evans 2008: 105*),* *luxuria* is the characteristic of Lucullus for Seneca Elder (*Contr.* 9.2.1). For Pliny Lucullus introduces 'foreign complexity' that 'threatens to drown native Roman simplicity' (Evans 2008: 97 and 120-121 commenting on Pliny *NH* 14.96). See also Pliny *NH* 36.49 with Evans' analysis of the *Marmum Luculleum* (2008: 94-96).

[295] Plut. *Luc.* 39, Vell. Pat. 2.33.4.

[296] True philhellene: Cicero in *Acad.* 2.2 and 4, Plut. *Luc.* 42 and Swain 1995: 259-46.

to impress two of his fellow citizens with lavish hospitality.[297] Why would Lucullus want his listeners to think that he was keen to invest in lavish banquets for himself and for his Roman guests but not for the Greeks? If we take the episode at face value and forget for a moment Plutarch's reading, it seems that what Lucullus may have been trying to demonstrate was that he had pleasure in sharing his riches with his fellow citizens, and not only with Greek guests. This would make sense only if we assumed that he had been object of criticism for that.

We do not know from where Plutarch obtained these anecdotes. However, the grouping, and the similarities in character and theme make it likely that they derive from the same source, and if a name must be made that would probably be Nepos.[298] The biographer was a contemporary of Lucullus and a friend of many of the most prominent intellectuals of his time (Cicero, Catullus, Atticus and probably Varro).[299] Although the distinction between Roman and foreign commanders appears to have been relevant to him only insofar as it helped to contextualise their qualities, as many Romans, Nepos had an ambivalent attitude towards Greece. Greek ideas, in a non-Greek context, could be a symbol of refinement or a mark of decadence, the discriminant being the general attitude of the character towards virtue and his *maiorum instituta*. In fact, he prises distinguished men for virtues such as c*ontinentia*, *pietas, industria*, *absinentia*, for their respect of the tradition of their land and for their loyalty to their state, while condemning individualism

[297] Plutarch (Plut. *Luc.* 41). On Plutarch's own interpretation and other possible ones of the episode see Scardigli 1989: 489n543). The real point here is not the lavish style of Lucullus' life but the fact that he wants to impress his guests at all costs.
[298] Scardigli suggests various sources for the three sections of the *Life* (1989: 254-55, 262-67, 283-84, for the years 66 to his death, she proposes a heterogeneous group of writers contemporary to Lucullus and Nepos (mentioned at 43.1).
[299] On Nepos' relations with the contemporary intellectual elite see: Geiger 1998, Geiger 1985, Titchener 2003: 96. Different opinion: Horsfall 1982 (*CHCL* 2): 290-300.

in public life and on military campaign.[300] Lucullus hardly fits within the boundaries set by Nepos for a virtuous general.[301] Nor does he appear to be an irreproachable philhellene. In fact, Nepos would, in his biography of Atticus, provide an example of a successful attempt to conciliate the traditional virtues with the new values; lack of political activity and refusal of private or public litigation with loyalty to Roman principles and personal *dignitas*, love for everything that was Greek with respect for the customs of the ancestors, generosity with his Roman and Greek friends and modesty (but not miserliness) in hospitality are the constituents of Atticus' character.[302] We may wonder if Lucullus might have been, for Nepos, a bad 'version' of Atticus. If so, the emphasis of Nepos may not have been, as in Plutarch, on the expenditures of Lucullus but on his adoption of the wrong (for a Roman) Greek habits.[303] Nepos' reading of Lucullus philhellenism would then be alternative to Cicero's and could reflect a tradition that would subsequently evolve into the depiction of him as un-Roman.

Certainly, we do not know whether the episodes narrated by Plutarch come from Nepos or not. It is perfectly possible that they could come from other authors. Varro, for

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[300] Dionisotti 1988: 41-43. The relationship of the generals with their community appears to be a recurring theme, cf. Stem 2012: 184 (on Epaminondas), also *Ages.* 4.2 (with Stem 2012: 210-11) on obedience to orders, *Them.* 8.1 and *Hann.* 1.2 on distrust of his fellow-citizen. Similar considerations can be made for the lives of Alcibiades, Timoleon and Pausanias (Dionisotti 1988: 40-44). Stem suggests that Nepos advocated a distinction between *mores* and *virtutes* and that *mores* should not be the object of moral judgment. Instead, they are essential to contextualize virtue which is universal (*Praef.* 1-3 with Stem 2012: 141). On Nepos' 'cultural relativism', cf. Bonaccorso 2013: 21-31, 34, Stem 2012: 140-47, Dionisotti 1988: 43, Bettini 2013.

[301] Nepos also extols the virtue of those, like Agesilaus and Timotheus, who did not appropriate spoils for their own personal benefit (*Agesilaus* 7.3, *Timotheus* 1.2-3 with Dionisotti 1988: 44-45) for a virtuous general. On Agesilaus public and private virtues, on his rejection of wealth as compensation for personal achievements as beneficial to the state, cf. Stem 2012: 222.

[302] On Atticus' ability to remain uncommitted and politically neutral amidst the highly factional conflicts of the late Republic while remaining loyal to his friends and preserving his *dignitas*, see Millar 1988.

[303] Judging Roman political manipulation of philhellenism from Plutarch entails various difficulties. For the Greek biographer, the assimilation of Greek culture is one of the determinant factors in the evaluation of a Roman (Swain 1995), and it was his intention to emphasise the Hellenic quality of Lucullus' education (Tröster 2008: 40-41). It is not surprising then that contempt for the supposed corrupting effect of Greek philosophy and customs does not find much space in the *Life of Lucullus*.

example, who, despite not being usually considered one of the main sources for Plutarch, certainly had a penchant for attacking Lucullus and was often quoted by Pliny.[304] Be this as it may, we do not know what exactly Plutarch's source may have said about Lucullus and ignore the context from which the episodes were extracted. However, it seems reasonable to acknowledge that allusions to un-Roman and philo-Greek behaviour were already present in the stories that were adapted by Plutarch. Not only does Lucullus' post Ciceronian un-Romaness present a philhellenic character, it has undeniable oriental features too. Plutarch explicitly compares him to a satrap and says that he owned a huge number of purple cloaks (Plut. *Luc.* 39.5), a detail that he picks from Horace (Hor. *Ep.* 1.6.40-46) who specifies that Lucullus had a collection of c*hlamydes* that he keeps for himself (implying that for a good Roman not only they are they fit for the public stage but also that despite his wealth he cannot enjoy his fortune because he does not wish to share it).[305] He would have cherries, the delicacy that he first imported from Pontus, as *secunda mensa* (dessert).[306] Surprisingly, if one remembers the accusations of impiety, the first thing Lucullus does as he crosses into Armenia is to sacrifice to the local river god and to the Persian goddess Anahita following the local custom.[307] The famous quip *Xerxes togatus* should be placed in the same context.

The story goes that Pompey, guest at one of Lucullus' properties, seeing a tunnel cut through a mountain to allow seawater to fill a fish-pond, commented that Lucullus

[304] *NH* 14.96 and 35.155, cf. Pittà 2015: 13.
[305] Cf. Evans 2008: 96-101. It may be of some relevance that Lucullus, along with the *Cappadocum rex* (Ariobarzanes, cf. Cicero *ad Att.* 6.1, and *ad fam.* 15.1), is mentioned in the section of the poem (which is a guide to happiness) that deals with wealth and not in the one that discusses gluttony.
[306] Pliny *NH* 15.102, Tert. *Apol.* 11.8, Servius *ad Georg* 2.18, Athen. 2.50E-51A.
[307] Plutarch (*Luc.* 24.3) calls her *Artemis Persian*. Lucullus would later identify this goddess with Diana of Aricia, an Italian deity to whose shrine at Nemi he would make an addition (Keaveney 2009: 142-43 and 143n13, 185-86 and 186n24).

was a ‘Xerxes in a toga’. The joke alludes to the cut of the Mount Athos and suggests that the undertaking was enormous. But it also brings forth a number of innuendos that would have been detectable to a man versed in Greek history (and Lucullus certainly was).[308] It suggests impiety.[309] It also implies luxury.[310] These allusions, implicit in the name of Xerxes, fit perfectly with all the slanders against Lucullus that we know from Cicero, but there is more to that. The comparison is also reminiscent of the widespread opinion that Lucullus was showing excessive pleasure in building (because Xerxes built extensively), alludes to distance from the Republican ideal (because Xerxes was a king), suggests racial inferiority and hints that behind extravagance insanity may have also been lurking.[311] If it was really Pompey who said so, then there is also a poisonous sting in the tail. Pompey would be remarking that Lucullus had failed to conquer Pontus and Mithridates, just as Xerxes had failed to conquer Greece and, even worse, he would imply that while he himself had returned as a new Alexander, Lucullus had become a new Xerxes. In other words, Lucullus, by being compared to Xerxes, becomes the example of the Roman who has lost his *Romanitas*, or of ‘an easterner in a thin veneer of Romanness’, while his lifestyle and love for his private pleasure make him the example of the inability to maintain proportions and priorities.[312] Thus, in the description of Lucullus’ degenerate old life, not only fondness for Greek things but also eastern and especially Persian elements play an important part.

The existence of Cicero’s and Varro’s critique of Lucullus’ greed and extravagance and, if we believe that Plutarch had Nepos or some other contemporary author as a

[308] Evans 2008: 101-04.
[309] Cf. Hdt. 1.109.3, Strabo 14.1.5 [634], 16.1.5 [738], Diod Sic. 17.72.6.
[310] From Aeschylus onwards (cf. *Pers.* 3, 45, 53, 80, 159) examples are aplenty.
[311] On Xerxes as builder, cf. Briant 2002: 554.
[312] Quote from Evans 2008: 104.

source, philhellenism also cannot be doubted. But what about the eastern element? Could it be a later invention? There are some clues that suggest that it may be dated to the last years of Lucullus too. Terraced villas (such as the one he ad at Tusculum) were modelled on Hellenistic royal residences. These palatial buildings (the best-preserved example is the site of Pergamum) were the result of diverse influences. The terraced structures, however, are probably modelled on satrapal architecture such as the palaces of Sardis and Daskyleion, Kelaiani in Phrygia. Tree-lined porticoed gardens of private residences were modelled on the Greek gymnasia but, because of the presence of exotic trees, with the association with eastern pleasures that comes with it, and the sporadic use of the term *paradeisoi*, they echoed the parks of the successor of Alexander and their Persian antecedents. Lucullus had first-hand experiences with these structures in Tigranocerta.[313] The expression *Xerxes togatus* also seems to have been formulated in the Late Republic. First because this, as the great majority of the stories about Lucullan profligacy, has Pompey as counterpart, and this makes good sense only in the context of a continuing relationship between the two men based on rivalry.[314] Even if Pompey was a later addition based on the desire of some writer to replace a relatively unknown character (Tubero) with a more famous one, this does not imply that the episode was

[313]Keaveney 2009: 212. On satrapal architecture see Nielsen 1994: 61-72, on influences in the palace of Pergamum Nielsen 1994: 110-11. Cf. infra note 382. Porticoed gardens of private residences as a way of incorporating corrupting luxury within a severely disciplined structure, see Zarmakoupi 2014: 113-15.
[314] Pompey's frequenting of Lucullus' properties has led some to consider that, at some point after Pompey's return, the relationship between the two might have returned to being friendly. However, there is no good reason for this sudden change of attitude (apart from the fact that Lucullus had supposedly retired and therefore abandoned the political arena, which probably never happened, cf. Hillman (1993)). A sudden and unmotivated change of attitude seems unlikely: continuing political rivalry is a better explanation than reconciliation (Keaveney 2009: 175-93, Scardigli 1989). Tröster (2008: 70-72) and Hillman (1993) have a good point when they note that the slanders / allegations (collected by Pliny and Plutarch) that besmirch Lucullus' reputation make sense only if seen against the backdrop of his political activity.

invented, very much the opposite, it suggests verisimilitude.[315] The anecdote with Pompey as protagonist, makes for a good story, but much less so with Tubero. The story may have been improved, but it was hardly invented. The second reason is lexical. The insult seems to dovetail too well with other contemporary slurs used to ridicule adversaries to be a later elaboration.[316] In short, when Plutarch makes Lucullus squander his capital of virtue (and of money) in private luxury, and Pliny the Elder condemns his *luxuria* as a symbol of foreignness and unnaturalness, they reorganize, and possibly distort, material that was already there.[317] It is not improbable that, at the time they wrote, Lucullus' 'persianization' had already been brought into the picture. From hedonism and excessive Hellenophilia to barbarism verging on 'Medism' it is only a short step.[318] Plutarch's and Pliny's contribution was to remove the political element which underpinned the moral attack on Lucullus.

Even though this may not have crossed over to accusations of collusion with the enemy, it would have been easy for those who had an interest in doing so, to suggest that Lucullus had 'gone native'. After all what is an easterner Greek? A sort of barbarian.[319] Lucullus had gone Greek, better, Asian, indeed, had almost become a Xerxes. There are precedents for this kind of attack. Sulla had been accused of being too soft with Mithridates. Rutilius Rufus, the *legatus* of Scaevola in Asia who, exiled, went to

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[315] The friend of Cicero not the Stoic Philosopher, as Plutarch writes: Plut. *Luc.* 39, cf. Scardigli 1989: 485n529, Jolivet 1987: 57n2. Pompey for Pliny *NH* 9.170 and Vell. Pat. 2.33.4.
[316] Evans 2008: 121-25.
[317] Keaveney 2009: 207.
[318] He used his riches as a 'captive barbarian' is Plutarch's comment (Plut. *Luc.* 41.7). In other words, Lucullus transforms Roman (good) spoils into (bad) easterner-like luxuries (cf. Plut. *Comp. Cim./Luc.* 1.5).
[319] Evident in Cicero's *Pro Flacco* where the easterner Greeks are Greeks who has acquired customs of the barbarians. See also Nepos about Pausanias (*Paus.* 3).

live in the East and would become an example of Roman integrity in handling the finances of a province, had at some point been also accused of Mithridatism.[320]

Thus, if the Persianization of Lucullus happened while he was still alive and it was not Cicero who decided to emphasise the 'Persian factor' and push on the connection between these 'faults' of Lucullus and his interest in Greek-Persian things, who was? If we ask ourselves *cui prodest*, the first name that springs to the mind is Pompey.

The rivalry between the two men went back a long way, probably from the beginning of their career under Sulla. By the time Lucullus was in Pontus, there must have been a fair amount of tension between the two and the *Lex Manilia* (even though behind it there might not have been the *longa manus* of Pompey) may have been the last straw.[321] In fact, the meeting with Pompey in Galatia ended with an exchange of vitriolic accusations.[322] Then, after Lucullus returned to Rome, Pompey undid most that his predecessor had done.[323] We do not know if the two protagonists took the issue personally, if and to what extent Pompey acted out of 'hatred' for Lucullus.[324] However, it is quite clear that even in the decisions inspired by strategic considerations, one of the main purposes of Pompey was to undermine Lucullus' network of supporters in the East and to 'create new bonds of exclusive power'.[325] Similarly, we do not know if Lucullus resented this, but we know that he did not miss the opportunity to return the favour when Pompey asked the senate land for his veterans. If Lucullus' main goal was to make

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[320] Plut. *Pomp.* 37, cf. Pais 1918 vol. 1: 54-62. See also Val Max. 2.10.5 and Magie 1950: 175. See also the case of Scaevola senior (Cic. *Brut.* 131 and Cic. *de fin.* 1.8-9).
[321] Keaveney 2009: 96.
[322] Plut. *Luc.* 36.2-4, Plut. *Pomp.* 31; cf. Dio 63.46 and Strabo 15.5.2 [567].
[323] Plutarch is explicit, cf. *Pomp.* 31; also Strabo 12.3.3 [557-558]
[324] Strabo 12.3.33 [558] *ἀπέχθειαν.*
[325] Tröster 2008: 146.

Pompey's life complicated, Pompey, we may assume, fought back.[326] In 60 BCE the political conflict between Lucullus and Pompey was still heated and it would remain so for the following years.

Besides, regardless of whether he was thinking of retiring, Lucullus at the time must have appeared to Pompey as his only significant rival. Cato and Cicero may have had *gravitas* and *auctoritas* but their military record was insignificant compared to Pompey's. Crassus had wealth and connections but lacked the moral status and had few significant military achievements. The star of Caesar was not yet on the rise. Lucullus had wealth, connections and a long military career. Rome in the first century BCE was a highly competitive environment in which, for any member of the elite with political interests, the display of grandeur and military power was essential to success and the promotion of status while the use of slander and 'unfair play' was standard procedure. It is very unlikely that Pompey and Lucullus had set aside differences, visited each other amicably and almost inconceivable that they had not taken precautions against their rivals. Plutarch may have believed so because he thought that Lucullus had retired. Our sources written under the emperors, may have interpreted the competition as less harsh because the elite was competing less harshly at their time and appearance in society may have counted less than closeness to the emperor,[327] but, there is a strong possibility that the two were still engaged in a battle and Pompey was chasing Lucullus' weaknesses.[328]

With this in mind the reprimands of Lucullus' luxury in Varro acquire a particular interest. Varro was a traditionalist and a moralist in his own right.[329] However, he was

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[326] Keaveaney 2009: 208-09.
[327] Tacitus *Ann.* 15.39.
[328] Tröster 2008: 140-50.
[329] Cf. *Rust.* 2 *praef.* 1-4.

also a collector of art and made profit from the exotic culinary tastes of his fellow citizens.[330] How do these positions reconcile? Varro was a loyal supporter of Pompey whom he accompanied in several military campaigns. In addition to providing his military expertise, he certainly acted as political counsellor and historian. He supported Pompey as governor of some Anatolian areas in the years of the Mithridatic War.[331] Thus, the suspicion arises that his moral tirades, rather than being hypocrisy or mere rhetorical exercise could be inspired by political convenience.

As often in politics the easy way to undermine an enemy is by attacking their reputation. At Rome pretty much everything (food, clothing, the people with whom one would associate with, and even, as we will see, how one decorated one's garden) could be turned into a political weapon and the weaknesses of Lucullus were well known. Hence, should not we allow for the possibility that allegations of degeneration and Persian excess would be politically motivated? I will return to this issue after discussing the triumphs of Lucullus and Pompey.

4. Pompey: Persia enters Rome in triumph

As we have seen, very probably Pompey plays an essential role in the 'Persianization' of Lucullus. There is also another aspect that should be added that is relevant not only for the reconstruction of the political struggle of the late Republic, but also for the

[330] Collector: Pliny *NH* 36.41, profit: *Rust.* 3.5.9-17, 3.12.7.

[331] Counsellor: Della Corte 1970: 58-61. Varro was with Pompey in Spain and against the pirates. He was not with him on the field during the Mithridatic War bur certainly supported him in his capacity of governor of Cappadocia, Phrygia and Lycaonia. It is certainly no coincidence that the *imperium* given to Pompey by the *Lex Manilia* did not include these areas. There was no doubt about Varro's allegiance. Cf. Della Corte 1970: 70-73.

reconstruction of the perception of Persia, and to understand the importance of the Mithridatic Wars in the process of acquisition of the Persian past by the Romans. With Pompey, Persia will make her triumphal – literally – entrance into Rome.

It is a very well-known argument of moralists that the influx of precious goods at Rome had begun with the conquest of the East and increased dramatically with the return of the armies from the wars in Asia. According to Livy, Gnaeus Manilius Vulso returning from his Galatian War in 187 BCE, brought to Rome golden crowns, coins, silver, gold and refined items such as bronze couches, tapestry, pedestal tables and sideboards. It is on this occasion that, for the first time, musician-girls and pricey cooks appeared at Rome.[332] The spectacle of this triumph must have been grandiose, but it was not centred on exoticism. There may have been a staggering amount of gold and coins but this was hardly a novelty and all the defeated and their weapons were Gallic, people well-known to the Romans.[333] Moreover, the bulk of the oriental luxury items brought to Rome, it appears, was not paraded in the triumph but were part of the booty the soldiers brought back with them.[334] Even the 'vivid, extravagant, and exotic', and extremely rich – judging from Plutarch's description – three-day long triumph of Aemilius Paullus over Perseus (167 BCE) did not display anything to which the Roman spectator would not be acquainted with if the most exotic items were the bowls bearing the names of Seleucus, Antigonus and Thericles (a Corinthian bowl maker), and the boots of Perseus.[335]

Lucullus' triumph

[332] Livy 39.6-7, cf. Pliny *NH* 34.14.
[333] Livy 39.7. Gauls were displayed in the triumphs of Marcellus and Scipio, see Beard 2007: 147-52.
[334] Livy 39.6.
[335] Plut. *Aem.* 32-33, cf. Livy 45.35.3. Quote from Beard 2007: 150-51.

Even Lucullus' triumph is strangely restrained. Or so it appears in Plutarch, who reports a brief (yet the most detailed we have) description.[336] As it was customary, there were placards detailing the amount of money given away by the general, gold and silver in great quantity, captured weapons, more than hundred warships, enough siege machines to fill the Circus Flaminius and tableware. The triumph was concluded by an offer from the booty to Hercules and a *polluctum / epulum* (a banquet) offered to the entire city and neighbouring villages.[337] Although the banquet must have been of considerable size, if one thinks of the wealth of the man and his long campaigns in Asia, the impression conveyed by the rest of the celebration is of a rather unpretentious spectacle. Plutarch, who elsewhere relishes in detailed descriptions of triumphs and ovations, openly remarks that it was 'not … a triumph which was startling and tumultuous from the length of the procession'.[338] Even more remarkable is the toning down of the military aspect. If some of the veterans could not participate because still in Asia under Pompey, the prisoners and the weapons had surely been transported to Rome. Yet, while gold, silver and weapons are described in some detail (including a six-feet high golden statue of Mithridates), Plutarch, rather dryly and hastily, lists only a 'small number of cataphract horsemen', ten scythe-bearing chariots (a small number if compared to the hundred deployed by Mithridates), sixty friends and generals of the king (very few if compared to the number that Pompey will parade) and even the siege engines and other machinery

[336] *Luc.* 37.2-4.

[337] On Lucullus' triumph: Keaveney 2009: 184-86. On the *epulum* and the tithe to Heracles see Marzano 2009.

[338] *Aem*. 32-33, *Marcellus* 8.1-5, 21.1-2 and 22.1-5. Quote: Plut. *Luc.* 37.2 (*οὐχ, ὥσπερ ἔνιοι, μήκει τε πομπῆς καὶ πλήθει τῶν κομιζομένων ἐκπληκτικὸν καὶ ὀχλώδη θρίαμβον*).

(in all likelihood, from the siege of Cyzicus), which must have been impressive judging from Appian's account of the battle, are only cursorily mentioned.[339]

It is hard to estimate the net worth of the material carried along the Roman streets and therefore it is difficult to compare Lucullus' booty to that of the generals who preceded him. However, whether it was as lavish as that of Vulso and Aemilius or not, one would expect Lucullus' triumph, at least, to bring the Roman imagination to a more remote place than any before. Instead what is conspicuously (and suspiciously) missing is the exotic East. What characterises the triumph of Lucullus is gold, food and its modesty.

There is an evident similarity between the triumphs of Sulla and Lucullus.[340] It might be that Lucullus followed in the footsteps of his mentor and other Sullans (Plut. *Sull.* 35.1, *Crass*. 2.3) and had opted for a restrained and traditional kind of triumph in which the most important thing is not the lavishness of the parade but the military aspect and the role the Romans play in the celebration. It is also possible that Plutarch had distorted the reports and reduced the exotic aspect in order to suggest that Lucullus could be skimping on public expenditure for egoistic reasons.[341] Similarly, one may wonder whether the emphasis on the size of the banquet that followed the ceremony should be understood as generosity towards the Romans or as a sign of decadence.[342] It is possible that for Plutarch, who does not make a secret of the affinity he sees between

[339] Plutarch *Luc.* 37.4 *καταφράκτων ἱππέων ὀλίγοι*; compare with 7.5. Pompey's 324 distinguished prisoners: App. *Mitr.* 117 [571], siege machines: App. *Mith.* 73-74 [313-322] and 76 [328].

[340] Sulla's triumph is quickly dismissed by Plutarch. It is impressive for the value and nature of the Mithridatic spoils but even more for the procession of exiled Romans who express their gratitude for having been allowed to return (*Sull.* 34) and for the splendid banquet he offered to the people (*Sull.* 35). Both Lucullus and Sulla made an offer to Heracles.

[341] Note the difference with Dio 4.21.4.

[342] On the ambiguous character of this public *epulum*, cf. Marzano 2009: 91-94.

Sulla and Lucullus, and for whom there is little to praise in the last years of both men, the relative moderation of Lucullus' triumph should not be considered praiseworthy but in keeping with the image of the greedy and debauched Sulla of the last years of his life.[343] It may not be a coincidence that the only exaggerated figures are the display of gold and silver and food. Moderation in public generosity and interest in lavish banquets, thus, may indicate something different from virtue or alignment with the tradition of the 'good old days'. It is tempting to consider the triumph as the concluding act of the first (well lived) part of his life and the first act of the degeneration of his later years. Pompey's triumph, by contrast, was of another league, with a prominent display of plunder from the East. Whether Plutarch's agenda may or may not have induced him to downsize the magnificence of certain aspects of Lucullus' triumph, the suspicion arises that the exoticism of Pompey's parade contributed to eclipse Lucullus' oriental achievement.

Pompey's triumph.

Pompey's triumph was lavish, excessive, magnificent.[344] The rams carried along the streets symbolized the Mediterranean Sea and the pirates. Pontus and Armenia were represented by the weapons and the goods captured in the many treasure cities of the king of Pontus.[345] Even more eye-catching were the statues of the defeated kings (Mithridates' statue was of gold and eight cubits high) – surely the centre piece of the

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[343] Affinity between Lucullus and Sulla: cf. Evans 2008: 98-101. Plutarch condemns Lucullus' luxury at *Luc.* 39-41, *An seni* 4.785F, and in the *Comparatio Cim./Luc.* 1.4, cf. Scardigli 1989: 290-93; condemnation of political and military activity in retirement at *Luc.* 38.2-5, 40.3.

[344] Pompey's triumph: Plut. *Pomp.* 45-46, Plin. *NH* 7.98, 37.12-16, 18; App. *Mith.* 17.117. Beard 2007: 7-41, Greenhalgh 1980: 168-77.

[345] It is likely that the crater in the Musei Capitolini be one of these items. (Musei Capitolini Roma, Inventory n. MC1068).
http://www.museicapitolini.org/it/percorsi/percorsi_per_sale/appartamento_dei_conservatori/sala_dei_trionfi/cratere_di_mitridate_v_eupatore (retrieved on 30/06/2019).

parade – Mithidates' throne and, we may imagine, his armour which Pompey was wearing under another prize plundered from Mithridates: the cloak of Alexander.[346] Some sources mention placards with the images of the absent protagonists of the war.[347] But what Pompey takes pains to ensure is that everybody understands that he has triumphed over the entire world.[348] He proclaims, with placards packed with names of far-off lands and peoples and with prisoners in national costumes, how much wealth and how many exotic lands and peoples he has conquered (1000 strongholds, 900 towns, 800 ships, founded 39 colonies).[349] A selection of products and objects evocative of exotic lands made their way to the Capitoline Hill. Africa is represented by balsam, Syria by the palm trees and Judaea by the balsam shrub. Onyx recalls India or Arabia.[350] For India, we also have pearls arranged to form a *musaeum*, a sundial and an oversized head of Pompey that sparks the fury of the moralist.[351] Finally, there is Persia. The names of the children of Mithridates are unmistakeably Persian: Xerxes, Cyrus, Darius, Oxathres, Artaphernes; then, there are myrrhinae cups that come from Carmania and Parthia, the plane trees that would decorate the gardens of Pompey and even the bed of Darius I.[352] Even if the origin and meaning of the board made of precious stones adorned with a golden moon may remain obscure, the golden mountain encircled by a vine and adorned with stags and lions, certainly recalls the Persian *paradeisoi* (even if this was the same

[346] App. *Mith.* 117 [577], Plut. *Pomp.* 42.
[347] App. *Mith.* 117 [577].
[348] Plut. *Pomp*. 46. All writers agree that Pompey was interested mainly in underlining that he had conquered the entire inhabited world, on this cf. Nicolet 1991: 31-33.
[349] Plut. *Pomp.* 45. The figures given by Pliny (*NH* 7.97-99) are slightly different but consistent.
[350] Pliny *NH* 37.90-91, cf. Parker 2008: 154-55.
[351] Plin. *NH* 37.14.
[352] Cups: Pliny *NH* 37.18 and 21, Darius' bed and Mithridates' children: App. *Mitr.* 116-117 [570-572]. Trees: balsam and palm trees and, almost certainly, plane trees (Plin. *NH* 12.11, 12.20 with Kuttner 1999: 345, on the balsam tree contra Beard 2007: 339n13).

'delight' that Pompey had received from the Jewish).[353] To round off the point he also assembled a 'huge a trophy of the inhabited world'.[354] The spectacle was grand, the military victories astounding, the size of the booty was staggering, the variety of material and its exoticism impressive. The whole world was on display and within this opulence it is remarkable how few objects of Anatolian, Jewish and Greek origin are mentioned (see below) and how great an emphasis there is on India and Persia, two lands that Pompey had not even touched.

Among Greek-Anatolian objects we can count Mithridates' library, which Pompey had translated from Greek into Latin—another parallel with Lucullus—three golden statues of Minerva, Mars, and Apollo which may well have been some oriental deities assimilated to Roman gods, but there must have been much more.[355] After all Mithridates was a Hellenistic king, if not with artistic interests for the sake of it, surely with knowledge of Greek art and an interest in using it as a means of propaganda. In his period of occupation of Asia and in the raids through Greece (not to mention what could have come from Chios and Cos, in addition to the cloak of Alexander) he must have collected quite a number of pieces of art.[356] If Mastrocinque is right in identifying the shipwreck of Antikythera with a transport carrying the spoils from Sinope, then we may have a good idea of the wealth of Greek artefacts that could be found in a Pontic city.[357]

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[353] Plin. *NH* 37.12-19. I wonder whether this object described by Pliny is the *τερπωλή* ('delight') worth 500 talents from Judaea representing a vine (*ἄμπελος*) or a garden (*κῆπος*) which Strabo (or Josephus) saw in the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus (and therefore must have been in the parade). One may also wonder what had happened to the vine (*ἄμπελον*) made with five talents of gold given by Aristobulos to Pompey or to the Egyptian crown worth four thousand pieces of gold (Josephus *AJ* 14.35-36).

[354] Dio Cass. 37.20-21; Diodorus Siculus mentions an inscription with all the peoples conquered (40.4).

[355] Statues: Pliny *NH* 37.14. The mind immediately goes to the statue of Heracles holding Telephus / Mithridates, see note 228.

[356] cf. App. *Mithr.* 115 [564] with 23 [93].

[357] Mastrocinque 2009: 314, with Bol 1972.

How do we explain this prevalence of the far-eastern element? There are three possibilities. First, it is an invention of Appian and Pliny. This is obviously hardly likely. There were other reports with which it was possible to compare their version (Asinius Pollio, Teophanes, memories and even official inventories). Second, the description we have mirrors the proportion between the artefacts of the parade. That is, there were more objects from Persia and India than from Anatolia and Syria in the triumph; this is unlikely. Third, the objects described were in the parade along with many others and the emphasis was placed on them by someone at some point because either they were the most unusual or impressive on account of their novelty or because of their meaning, or for both reasons. If so, who decided to emphasise some objects and why? Was it Pompey, Pliny and Appian or one of their sources? It is doubtful that the responsibility could be given to Pliny and Appian. Surely, they were selective but their aims explain only partially their choices. Pliny's goal is to describe some natural phenomena or object and it is understandable that he dedicated more space to the unusual ones, but he was not fussy about their origin if they could indicate overindulgence.[358] If there had been other examples of excessive objects that suited him in the procession he would very probably have named and used them regardless of their provenance. But he did not. Could it be that the only excessive objects in Pompey's triumph were Indian or Persian? It is more likely that the emphasis on Persia was already there in the sources of Pliny either because Pompey had organised his parade to convey this idea or because whoever described it wanted to convey this impression. There are good reasons to think that Pompey had a hand in this. First, it would be perfectly consistent with the imagery of his triumph. If he

[358] For example, the *Marmum Luculleum* was from Melos according to Pliny *NH* 36.49.

wanted to appear as the conqueror of the entire world, he had to justify his claim and the best evidence was obviously the booty. But not any kind of booty would serve the purpose: it must be recognisable and unmissable. What better evidence than the most characteristic products of every land? The excessive emphasis on India and Persia was necessary because they had not been conquered. The second aspect has to do with the meaning of the objects displayed. By conquering the heir of Darius and of Alexander, Pompey could make himself the conqueror of the East in his own right. Finally, although it is impossible to know exactly what sources Plutarch and Pliny may have used, there is a greater chance that one might have been Theophanes, the historian on Pompey's payroll. If he decided to improve the report of the triumph, it is without doubt that he did so in accordance to the wishes of his master.

It is true that other reports (Plutarch's, Diodorus' and Dio Cassius') do not mention anything about the booty that might allude to Persia, but there are good explanations for these omissions. Diodorus' short fragment and Dio's compressed account lack the details to be relevant, while Plutarch has a very good reason for omitting any detail that would recall Persia. In his view, the triumph is the climax of Pompey's career. He is the hero of the people, he is the conqueror of the world. To this point, Plutarch admits, he had enjoyed the fortune of Alexander; had he died, the implication is, his achievements would have made him similar to the Macedonian.[359] But he did not die, thus, the comparison is dismissed as inappropriate. Then the attention of the biographer moves quickly away from the triumph to what really is the centre of his interest: the second part of Pompey's life when the popular hero becomes an instrument

[359] Plut. *Pomp.* 46.1.

in the hands of Clodius and Caesar.[360] It is not a coincidence, thus, that Plutarch's focus is on the symbols of military victory (trophies, captured peoples, revenues, lists of lands) while the anecdotes and references that point to Alexander are ignored.[361] It seems reasonable then to believe that the details reported by Arrian and Pliny should not be dismissed as fabrications or wild exaggeration and that Persia and India figured prominently in the triumph of Pompey.

Garden: Pompey's triumph set in stone.

After the triumph, Pompey embarked on the construction and restoration of an impressive series of public buildings. He built a temple to Minerva and restored a temple to Hercules.[362] He built the Theatre of Pompey with the annexes: the temple of *Venus Victrix* and the garden that goes under the name of Porticus Pompeii. Although the details of the structure and decoration may be vague, it seems fairly clear that the complex was a combination of architectural elements of eastern and western origin with a clear purpose: to form a gigantic representation of Pompey's ambition and, at least from the point of view of the general, an enduring memento of his eastern successes.[363] This structure is of particular note because here the Persian element surfaces again.

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[360] On the *Life of Pompey* as tendentious and divided into two separate halves, see Pelling 1986: 162-63 and 162n11.

[361] It is worth noting that the objects that are mentioned in Pompey's triumph are the objects that receive less emphasis in Lucullus' triumph. If one recalls the considerations made in the *Life of Lucullus* on the right occupation in late life, the idea that Plutarch may have Lucullus in mind and not only Alexander is not inconceivable. The second part of Lucullus' life is given to pleasure, that of Pompey to political career. None of the two options is advisable and in fact in both cases the outcome is regrettable.

[362] Pliny *NH* 7.9.7, Vitr. 3.3.5.

[363] Beard 2007: 18-22. The various works of art, some originals imported as spoil of war other copies, are variously reconstructed and interpreted and it is not clear whether the model for the complex theatre-temple should be considered Italian or from Mytilene (Plut. *Pomp.* 42.7-10, discussion in Monterroso Checa 2010: 340-53)

The complex included several images connecting Europe, Greece and the orient. There were statues and paintings of famous mythical characters such as Alcippe, Greek poetesses and *hetairai* and Cadmus and Europa.[364] The oriental element is characterized by femininity.[365] The military supremacy of Rome and Pompey over the East was duly emphasised by the temple of *Venus Victrix* and the rows of plane trees (the same trees that probably had been paraded in the triumph) recalling the military ranks of a disciplined army, towering over the collection of fourteen statues of women (probably) representing the peoples conquered by Pompey in his eastern campaign, distributed along a portico (the *porticus ad nationem*).[366] Portraits of Alexander, which recall the *imitatio* implicit in the triumph, provided the link between the two aspects of the representation: the masculine element (Pompey-Alexander) submits and organises the feminine East.[367] However, as in the triumph, the message goes beyond the display of power; it suggests unity between Greek and Roman culture under the aegis (and protection) of Pompey.[368] In other words, Pompey's 'attempt to set his triumph in stone' represents the logical and ideological continuation of the parade and is consistent with its combination of aggression and conciliation.[369] It is then of some significance that within this complex Pompey decided to include some very distinctive allusions to Persia.

The reconstruction of the decoration of the garden presents some difficulties but the presence of lofty plane trees arranged in parallel lines, mentioned by Propertius, has

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[364] Coarelli 1971-1972: 100-103, Kuttner 1999.
[365] Kuttner 1999: 349.
[366] Pliny *NH* 36.41, Gleason 1994: 19. Serv. *Aen.* 8.721, Suet. *Nero* 46 with Castagnoli 1982: 124-25.
[367] Pliny *NH* 35.114 and 35.132.
[368] Kuttner (1995a) contends that Pergamene art was used as a model for the iconographic programme and suggests that Pompey did so because he wished to present himself as the defender of 'Hellenistic culture against the delusive violence of a non-Hellenic Oriental'.
[369] Beard 2007: 22.

not (yet) been disputed.[370] For a Greek and an even only mildly Hellenized Roman, the use of plane trees is inextricably linked with Persia on account of the special association it had with the Achaemenid kings. The arrangement of trees, in orderly spaced lines had been the hallmark of Persian *paradeisoi,* walled gardens used for a variety of purposes, of the King of Kings and his satraps.[371] If, as it has been suggested, some plane trees in the garden of Pompey were also used to support a vine, the influence of Achaemenid models would become very probable.[372] In fact it was not a Roman habit to pair vines with plane trees, but this may well have been a practice (how common is hard to define) in the gardens of the Achaemenid king. A golden plane-tree adorned with a jewelled vine intrigued classical writers for centuries (although their precise significance and use remain unknown, it is hard to believe that it was an invented motive, without any grounding in reality).[373] No less curiosity (and renown) provoked Herodotus' story of Xerxes decorating and honouring of a plane-tree which was repeated by Pliny and Aelianus, who surely copied it from some Greek author who has not survived.[374] Additionally, although it could be said that to a certain extent, through the mediation of Hellenistic architecture, all gardens at Rome were influenced by oriental *paradeisoi,* their Achaemenid origin was well-known, so much so that they – in the East – were often intentionally used as a means of legitimization by those who aspired to the title of 'King

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[370] Prop. 2.32.13. Problems with the reconstruction are neatly summarized by the sceptic M. Beard (2007: 24-25 and notes).

[371] Avestan *pairidaēza-*, Old Persian **paridaida-*, Median **paridaiza-* meaning 'walled-around, i.e., a walled garden, Greek *paradeisoi*. Xenophon, *Oec.* 4.20-25, Arrian *Anabasis* 5.29.4-5. Tuplin 1996: 88-131.

[372] Kuttner 1999: 364-367 suggests that there was 'at least one display of fruited vine trained on a plane tree' in the place. Contra Beard 2007: 342n51.

[373] Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.38, Hdt. 7.27, Athen. 12.514D, Diod. Sic. 19.48.6-7.

[374] Hdt. 7.31, Pliny *NH* 17.42, Aelianus 2.14. On Persian kings and plants see Briant 2002 (History of Persian…): 234-37. On the plane tree, see also Pliny *NH* 12.3.4-12.

of Kings'.[375] It is worth repeating that one of the kings who had this kind of ambition was none other than Tigranes, whose gardens at Tigranocerta had been razed by Lucullus.[376]

As it stands, the evidence is admittedly not of the strongest nature but if we add to this the objects carried in the triumph (with which the garden forms a continuum) – especially the golden mountain surrounded by a grapevine – and the strong association between Pompey and Alexander, the presence of the Persian element is difficult to ignore.[377] Persian allusions cannot have gone unnoticed nor can they be deemed coincidental after a campaign against two kings of which one proclaimed his descent from Darius and Cyrus and the other adopted their title ('King of Kings').[378] And thus, Persia made her way into the garden – theatre – temple complex of Pompey, a place whose structure and organization had been devised to convey the idea that Romans and eastern Hellenised subjects would expect their relationship as mutually favourable.

What conclusions can we draw from this? The cloak of Alexander worn by Pompey and the paintings of the Macedonian do not simply point to an episode of *imitatio Alexandrii*. The message is more sophisticated. Pompey put up a display that is more than a triumph over Pontus, Syria and the pirates, it is a triumph over Persia and beyond: it is the definitive triumph over the East! Greek, Persian and even Indian heritage converge on him. Pompey, the only true heir of Alexander, the 'good gardener', represents the appropriation of both the Hellenic and the Persian past and symbolizes how, through the

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[375] On the Achaemenid *paradeisoi* as the model for palace gardens in Asia Minor, Greece and even Syracuse, see Nielsen 1994: 35-80. Cf. Canepa 2017: 220-222. On the Persian-Hellenistic model for Roman gardens of the Republican period, see Grimal 1969: 67-70 and 79-82; contra Tuplin 1996:122-23 who considers them a development of a Greek model. See notes 377, 382 and 383. Lucullus' gardens, however, were the first to be built on an oriental scale (the *Horti Pompeiani* cannot be reconstructed).
[376] Appian. *Mithr.* 84 [380].
[377] 'this is the first Roman *hortus* to deliberately import, assemble and order them [plane trees] as Cyrus had.' (Kuttner 1999: 347).
[378] Shayegan (2011: 327-28) suggests that Pompey prompted Tigranes to adopt the title 'king of kings' because defeating the 'heir' of the Achaemenids would have made his *imitatio Alexandrii* more credible.

victory over the eastern kings, the eastern element may be integrated into the Mediterranean world.[379]

This is, on the one hand, an evident reaction, although admittedly late (but not late enough for the Romans to have forgotten the events of 88 BCDE and their consequences) to Mithridates' propaganda. Those who had seen in Mithridates the champion of the Asian cause could see in Rome a new patron, whose actions were so effective that the captives did not need to be killed. By choosing a restrained attitude, Pompey draws a clear distinction between himself and the king of Pontus. Mass murder or indiscriminate revenge are substituted with appeasement.[380] More importantly, the representation picks up one of the most important (the most, according to Marina Torelli) themes elaborated by Cicero in his *Pro Lege Manilia*: the Romans could think that Pompey had offered the Asians a valid alternative and therefore reduced the possibility of a new revolt and its consequences.[381] The triumphal imagery suggests that it is only with the return of Pompey and his victories that the problems that were initiated with the Asian Vespers had come to an end. Pompey brings order where others brought terror and violence. In other words, the circle is closed, Pompey brings back victory and stability to the *whole* of the world and even the most oriental elements can be accepted.

There are two further important corollaries to this ideological construct. The first is political. Pompey's triumph and successive building programme are a direct challenge to the image of Lucullus. Firstly, there is the *imitiatio Alexandrii*. It is evident that this phenomenon cannot be seen in isolation and it has been proved that played a part in the

[379] On the king as 'good gardener': Kuttner 1999: 366-67, Briant 1996: 232-34.
[380] Moderation may be explained by fact that the defeated enemies could not be displayed in the parade; the need to distract the viewers from this not irrelevant detail may have suggested the idea to shift the focus on leniency.
[381] Torelli 1982: 17.

self-promotion of several generals from Scipio onwards.[382] Since there is a high probability that Lucullus had intentionally imitated the Macedon from the beginning of his career, and a good probability (if Ballesteros-Pastor is correct) that he did not stop identifying himself with Alexander until the end of his life, then we have the two men pursuing their personal association with the Macedonian for several years.[383] It goes without saying that Pompey's attitude must have appeared as a challenge to Lucullus and vice-versa. Secondly, the triumph. As mentioned before, it was structured to present Pompey as the conqueror of the world and the most successful of all the Roman generals. However, there are some very explicit features which would have pointed directly to Lucullus' precedent in order to highlight the superiority of Pompey's achievements. In addition to the Alexandrian motive, the size of the statues of the defeated, the number of friends and generals of Mithridates paraded are evidently there to suggests comparison with Lucullus. The competition between the two men may have extended to their relationship to the gods and even to gardening. Lucullus, as we have mentioned, had a special relationship with Hercules whom he honoured with a donation and celebrations, among which the banquet he had offered to the citizens stands out for its unprecedented size.[384] Although the offer to Hercules seems to have been a long-standing tradition, it received a boost in the first century BCE on account of the influence exerted by Hellenistic tradition and the rising rivalry among the generals. It is hardly a coincidence that in his triumph Lucullus had taken the trouble to expand the celebratory banquet to an extraordinary size: Hercules is a god that was particularly dear to Sulla but

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[382] Spencer 2002 and 2009.

[383] Ballesteros-Pastor 1998: 26.

[384] On the relationship between the triumph and Hercules Marzano 2009, on Lucullus in particular, *eadem*: 95.

also to the Hellenistic kings and Mithridates. Although we do not have written records of a similar banquet offered by Pompey it is fairly safe to assume that his celebrations included one as an accessory to an offer to Hercules and we know that Pliny says that Pompey 'equalled Alexander the Great, and even Hercules and Liber'.[385] Thirdly, Pompey was not the first to import plants but was the first to display trees in a triumph and he did so on a grand scale. Again, the comparison with Lucullus looms. Lucullus' had imported the cherry tree, a plant that would henceforth be associated with him.[386] One may wonder whether he may also have wished to display the tree in his parade but undoubtedly Pompey made sure that his display of trees obliterated any precedent, even if only hypothetical, in size and exoticism.[387] Moreover, not only did Pompey outdo his rival on the quantity and quality, but also on how he used the plants. It has been shown that by the time of Pompey's triumph there was a strong connection between victories, self-promotion and the enrichment of the agricultural production of Italy. To put it simply, adding new species to the list of vegetables, was an 'expression of imperialism'.[388] These newly imported plants had always ended up in private estates, so did the cherry tree, which was surely planted in Lucullus' properties.[389] The trees of Pompey, however, did not end up in one of his *fundi,* but in a garden open to the public built on his own land. It is worth noticing that there is a significant difference between the use that Pompey (and Caesar after him) made of his private gardens in the years immediately

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[385] Pliny *HN* 7.95. Marzano 2009: 84n12. On Pompey as Heracles, cf. Sauron 1987: 463-65.
[386] It may be interesting to note that, although Lucullus had the privilege of giving the name to the tree (*cerasus*) this was not his name (this was quite common, for some examples, see Marzano 2014: 225-26). His name was attached to the much more reproachable (according to Pliny) marble (see *supra*).
[387] Marzano, 2014: 209-10. At least any precedent seen at Rome. On a procession including trees see the description of Ptolomy II Philadelphus' *pompé* in, probably, 279/8 as reported by Athenaeus 5.196D-203B = *FGH* 627F2 esp. 201B.
[388] Marzano 2014: 209 text and n.65.
[389] Marzano 2014: 229.

following his return and the creation of a garden open to the public (the *porticus Pompeianus*), regardless of whether this has to be intended as an accessory of the private property of Pompey more than a proper bequest to the citizens.[390] Lucullus' is the first of an impressive series of green spaces that Pliny would call 'delightful places, farms and country houses in town' dedicated only to amusement in accordance with the example set by 'the teacher of leisure Epicurus'.[391] This is relevant because there was clearly a garden-competition among the wealthy. Pompey took up the challenge and entered the competition, but by making the complex accessible to the people and by giving it a public purpose he also made permanent what had hitherto been only an occasional privilege. Finally, this botanical rivalry seems to have extended to encompass culture. Plutarch reminds us that the library of Lucullus, rich in beautiful volumes but acquired in a dishonourable way, was open to the public but frequented principally by Greeks.[392] Pompey, by contrast, had the treaties on medicinal plants of Mithridates translated into Latin for the benefit of 'mankind'.[393]

There are good reasons to doubt of the lack of interest of Pompey's gifts. Surely his goal was his own advantage (indeed it might well be that, regardless of the intentions, the new knowledge brought some benefit to humanity). What matters is that in erecting

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[390] Plut. *Pomp.* 44.4 says that Pompey in 61 BCE opened his private garden for a distribution of money to the tribes in support of Afranius' candidacy. Caesar opened his gardens for a banquet during his Spanish triumph. On the ambivalent nature of the public character of the *Porticus Pompeianus*, see Russell 2016: 153-86.

[391] Pliny *NH* 19.49-50: *in ipsa urbe delicias agros villasque … Epicurus otii magister*. 26 gardens appeared between 66 and the last two decades of the first century BCE. Lucullus' garden is the third of the private *horti* mentioned by the sources, the first in the first century BCE. Before Lucullus' gardens only two examples of suburban *horti* are known: Scipio's and Brutus Callaicus, the former dates to around 163 BCE and the latter to around 129 BCE (cf. Carandini and Carafa 2013 (vol. 1): 74-75). On Lucullus' *horti:* Jolivet and Broise 1987: 747-61.

[392] Plut. *Luc.* 41.1. The library came from Pontus (*ex pontica preda* – Isid. of Seville *Etym.* 6.5.1). Cato and Cicero preferred to roam the library of Lucullus at Tusculum.

[393] Pliny *NH* 25.7. It may also be noted that, even if peculiar to a barbarian tyrant, the practice of gardening is not heavily characterized by barbarian overtones: gardening has often been taken to represent order and virtue (cf. Xen *Oec*. 4.16-25 and note 379). Cf. Pliny *NH* 19.50.

a lasting monument to his personal glory he followed a coherent pattern. The ostentatiousness of the parade, the insistence on the conquest of such great variety of peoples in the East, must have amounted to a rebuff for Lucullus – if not to him personally, surely to his public image and this must have been one of the goals of Pompey. He must have wanted to show that he had done much better than what his predecessor had or even could have done; not surprising, especially if we remember his fame of 'triumph thief'.[394] Thus, Pompey used his land to build a garden; he opened it to the public giving to the Romans a place where they spend their time in political, cultural and even – according to Catullus – sexual leisure (admittedly, this was probably not part of Pompey's plans).[395] By decorating it with the spoils of his wars he created a perpetual memento of his triumph. He studied its location in such way that the proximity of his house kept the connection between him and his monument. It was a place in which the ostentatious display of the benefits acquired through conquests, including plants, contrasted nicely with the reclusive pleasures of the avaricious Lucullus, parsimonious in public expenses and ready to share his time, libraries and pleasant retreats with some Greeks but not with his fellow citizens.[396] The message is that Pompey had 'Romanized' a (predominantly) Persian practice, Lucullus had been 'Persianized' by it.[397]

[394] Plut. *Pomp.* 29, 19, *Crassus* 21.
[395] *Catull.* 55.10-12.
[396] On Lucullus' gardens as inspired by the royal *paradeisoi* of Tigranocerta (App. *Mith.* 84) and ponds and other enclosures for animals which he might have copied from the palaces of the Hellenic Kings, cf. Keaveney 2009: 212. On Tigranocerta and Gardens: Garsoïan 1987, 1999, 2005. On Pergamean precedent of Pompey's complex cf. Kuttner 1999: 348 and Kuttner 1995a: esp. 170-74.
[397] Gardens were not a Persian prerogative. The idea of creating a space suited for intellectual pleasures based on the model of the gardens of Epicurus and the Academia certainly is one of the reasons that prompted Pompey and Lucullus to create their parks. As a model, Pompey may have looked at the *alsos* sponsored by Cimon to adorn the Academia (a garden with pathways and a gymnasium, Plut. *Cimon* 13). As mentioned (see note 361) it is unclear if this was inspired by Persian *paradeisoi* or a development of a Greek model. However, the problem of origins is relatively important, for in Pompey's gardens, the precedent is furthermore elaborated and expanded with the intentional inclusion of eastern features. In

Rivalry with Lucullus may not have been the main reason for Pompey's building programme and triumphal imagery; a display of benevolence towards his fellow citizens, with the undisputable purpose of gaining public support, would better explain his motivations, but the occasion to embarrass his adversary must have been very welcome to him. If Clodius could cast aspersions on Lucullus for being haughty, greedy, attracted by luxury, by the Greek world and for disregarding his men, if Cicero could criticise Lucullus' inactivity and lifestyle, why could not Pompey do the same and humiliate his rival also for his military achievements?[398] Pompey by 'Romanizing' gardening emphasises the otherness of Lucullus' gardening, by displaying conquered wealth and by giving it to the Romans he emphasises his triumph over wealth and the triumph of wealth over Lucullus. His claim to be Hercules is not more solid than the one of Mithridates, but by comparing himself to Hercules-Alexander, Pompey makes Lucullus the man who moves against the East and fails; who does not defeat but is defeated. The Persianization of Lucullus is complete, and at the end of this process, it is easy for Pompey to call Lucullus a 'Xerxes in a toga'.

The second corollary is cultural. Pompey could not boast that he had subjugated Persia but he knew (and anybody who counted in Rome too) that Mithridates had claimed that he was the legitimate heir of the Persian empire: by parading the paraphernalia that connected the king of Pontus to the Achaemenids, he could claim that

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terms of glorification of imperialism, for example, the eastern elements tumps the Greek (e.g. the allusion to world power does not come from any Athenian precedent but was part of the eastern, and probably Persian, ideology).

[398] Clodius: Plut. *Luc.* 34.4-5. It is remarkable that in the bombastic – and unsuccessful – re-enactment of Pompey's triumph in 55 on occasion of the inauguration of the theatre (Beard 2007: 26, Greenhalgh 1981: 54-61), there is no trace of the most oriental of the preys. Is it because Lucullus is dead? Surely the agenda of Pompey by that time had changed. The conquer of the world was trying to revamp his political image not to show that he had brought the world under Rome's sway.

he had brought Persia to Rome as captive and easily fit into Alexander's shoes. By emphasising the Indian and Persian elements he made sure that everybody would perceive that all the difficulties that had embroiled Rome in the affairs of the East from the rebellion of Aristonicus to the attempts of expansion of Tigranes had finally come to an end. Mithridates' propaganda had become useful to the Roman general. Now, if anybody (else) had ever claimed some affinity with Alexander, their claim could be dismissed.[399]

Conclusion

The triumph of Pompey concluded the long and bloody episode of the Mithridatic Wars. The consequences of the struggle with Pontus were momentous. Rome managed to bring Anatolia and Syria under her control and asserted her hegemony over the eastern Mediterranean world. The combined effort of Sulla, Lucullus and Pompey restructured the administration of the province of Asia and set the foundation for the administration of the other eastern provinces. In the process, Rome accumulated an enormous amount of wealth. Among these prodigious accomplishments one could count the less exceptional but still not contemptible feat of having confronted and defeated the successor of Alexander and Cyrus. A full triumph over the Greek and the eastern world.

[399] One wonders what the pearl-made portrait, which Pliny describes as 'with the hair swept back', did look like and how did it compare with the artefacts representing Mithridates (the giant statue in gold and the very vivid paintings, cf. Plin. *NH* 33.151 and Appian *Mith.* 116 [570]), for both claimed some connections with Alexander and Mithridates modelled his portraits (in marble and on coins) on those of Alexander. How many of the 85 million drachmas, plus whatever amount had been distributed to the soldiers, bore the image of Mithridates in the guise of Alexander?

The interest of the Athenians for Persia was founded on the mythologization of the Persian Wars and determined by the long conflict between the two lands. The conquest of Alexander then created a new world in which Greece and Asia mixed and found a way to cohabit. The arrival of Rome in the Hellenized East was, for some Greek thinkers (such as Polybius and Posidonius), simply a step further in a process that could be analysed through an abstract model of history or geography such as geographic determinism or the succession of empires. But all this was still rather alien to Rome. When she faced Mithridates, a fully developed and coherent concept of Persia had not been yet elaborated. Only isolated allusions had appeared, such as the proverbial Persian luxury, mentioned by Plautus. After 88 BCE, when Roman generals entered the East, they found a situation of relative balance between Hellenic and Persian elements and approached the Persian past in a pragmatic way.[400] Their entanglement with the memory of Persia was not affected by abstract speculation whether historiographic or ethnic, nor was it based on the memory of the Persian Wars. Even rhetorical expressions of Greek origin play a minor part. With the Mithridatic Wars, the Persian element acquired crucial importance. It was essential to the self-presentation of Mithridates, it influenced the way all the Roman generals dealt with the eastern potentates and independent cities. It became central in determining of the vastness of Pompey's conquests. It was skilfully used by Pompey to undermine the credibility and the public image of his most dangerous rival both in the public and in the private context, and proved to be of great value in order to represent the definitive defeat of Mithridates and the integration of whole East under Rome. The Roman involvement with the image of Persia was not an episode of

[400] The Persian past is not the past of the Achaemenid Empire but the 'reconstructed' Persian past of the post-satrapal dynasties.

appropriation of the Greek perception of Persia, intended as opposition East – West, but represented an episode of imperialist policy. In other words, it was informed by the necessity to assert supremacy and on the dynamic of internal politics.

The importance of the Mithridatic Wars lies not in the way Persia is represented or assimilated or in the way the Greek idea of Persia is absorbed or elaborated. They are significant because Rome had to face the heritage of Persia directly. By appropriating a Persian past (real or supposed) and using it against Rome, Mithridates triggered a series of reactions that led to the use of Persia within the political discourse of the Late Republic. It may be true that, on a very basic level, Pompey offers to his public a simplistic representation of Persia as a synonym for fabulous wealth and a land of marvels that is consistent with Plautus' conception. However, especially because of Pompey's attempt to situate himself in the position of the new Alexander, the man who could unite East and West, his taste for flamboyance, and the political / military rivalry between him and Lucullus, the Far East made its entrance right to the centre of Rome and compelled the Romans to elaborate a concept of Persia.[401] A concept, it is worth repeating, which has little to do with the fourth century BCE Athenian idea of Persia, let alone with Parthia. It is thanks to this 'opening' that Achaemenids' historical images and examples would begin playing a role in the formation of the Romans' own political memory and political ('national') identity. It is through this 'opening', that knowledge, images (with which the Romans were already familiar) and biases borrowed from the Greeks were recoded, transformed and became part of the network of connections that is the defining factor

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[401] It does not really matter (to this argument) whether Pompey cultivated a personal affiliation with the mythical figure of Alexander. Mithridates had revamped the myth and Pompey came across it, whether he liked it or not. Thus, the cloak of Alexander is at the same time a spoil of war and an item charged with ideological meaning. Alexander is, and will be, perceived with mixture of respect and superiority. His character transcends into a symbol.

of appropriation, and – as we will see in chapter three – would, in the long run, contribute to the development of the idea of 'emperor'.[402] It is from this point that we must move to understand how the images of this distant and 'alien' past of one people worked in forming the self-consciousness of another people.

[402] And supply part of the trappings of that status, such as the royal purple, which originated from Iran (Xen. *Anab.* 1.2, cf. Ball 2016: 21).

CHAPTER TWO

THE AUGUSTAN AGE. THE PARTHIAN 'PROBLEM', THE 'NORMALIZATION' OF THE EAST AND THE MEMORY OF THE PERSIAN WARS.

The previous chapter followed the evolution of the perception of Achaemenid Persia until the triumph of Pompey. It emerged that the Roman elite was familiar enough with Greek history to manipulate it to their own advantage but there neither appeared any significant connection between the Persian Wars and the engagement of the Romans in the East nor did any appreciable links emerge between Parthia and Achaemenid Persia. Then, the Mithridatic wars and Pompey created an interest in and an image of Persia as exotic, conquered and linked to Alexander. What happens to this idea of Persia after the triumph of Pompey? How did this interest develop?

In essence, the most accepted answer to the question is as follows. In the forties, after a period during which the Romans are busy fighting each other, when Antony moves East, begins his partnership with Cleopatra and is embroiled in an attempt to conquer Parthia first, and later in the war with Octavian, Persian themes resurface. Their function is two-fold, they supply a precedent for the opposition East – West in the context of a complex (and often contradictory) ideological construct that involves the demonization of the eastern enemies and provide the Romans with an image of the Parthians they did not have from direct experience.[403] In this process, in which the war against Antony and Cleopatra is perceived as a repetition of the Persian Wars, the climactic moment would

[403] Spawforth 1994: 240, and 2012: 103-04, Hardie 2007: 138-42, Schneider 2007: 70, Makhlaiuk 2015.

be the battle of Actium, intended as a replica of the Battle of Salamis.[404] The purpose of this chapter is to provide some qualification to this reconstruction.

It is surely correct that some of the connections between these crucial events can be detected. It is similarly true that the years of Augustus' *principate* are a key moment in the formation of the idea of Parthia at Rome and also in the definition of the idea of Achaemenid Persia. However, whether the Parthians were perceived and represented as the enemy of the civilized Greek-Romans who, like the Athenians and the Greeks will ultimately prevail, is, in my opinion, debatable. The following pages will suggest that the 'Persian Wars mania' was a development which came about after 20 BCE not as a direct consequence of a shared Greek-Roman myth-historical tradition but as the – rather fortuitous – combination of a series of political and cultural factors, analysis and disentanglement of which are the object of this chapter.[405]

Again, context is crucial. Internal struggle for power, the development of a new institutional model and unification of the Roman world are fundamental to contextualise the appropriation of Persian memories, in this instance, the Persian Wars. This sort of process would not be conceivable in any other context. It is the evolution (or revolution) prompted by the rise to power of Octavian that produced the appropriation in the terms and modes outlined below.[406]

In order to set the two crucial events (the Battle of Actium and the Parthian problem) in context and better understand their relationship with the memory of

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[404] Spawforth 2012: 103-04, Hardie 2007: 130, Hölscher 1984, Kellum 2010: 197-98.

[405] 'mania' Spawforth 1994: 233.

[406] To such extent that successive re-uses of the Persian Wars can often be perceived more as a repetition of the Augustan model rather than an instance of appropriation of Persian memories. The imitation of the Augustan model trumps the revival of the Persian Wars at least in Nero's case (Champlin 2003: 112-44).

Achaemenid Persia, a short historical introduction will be provided followed by an assessment the role of Achaemenid Persia in relation to these events. A careful reconstruction of the evolution of the issue after the return of the standards in 20 BCE will suggest that the revival of the Persian Wars and the image of the Parthians are the consequence, almost a by-product, of political and cultural manoeuvres that can be understood only in the context of the 'normalization' of the state and consolidation of power of the *princeps*.[407]

1. Rome and Persia: from Pompey to Actium.

The Parthian Problem.

As we have seen, in the years of the Mithridatic wars and immediate aftermaths the memory of Persia made its way into Rome. This was caused (*inter alia*) by the necessity to confront and contrast the image of a king suitable for the East and the West that Mithridates had promoted by adopting Persia as one of his models. He was, in fact, an alternative to Rome, a source of inspiration to all those who aspired to be the masters of the Eastern Mediterranean and hosted ambitions of world supremacy. Now the Roman general Pompey, the new Alexander, the winner of Mithridates – the self-styled heir of the Achaemenids – could claim to have brought the *orbs terrarum* under Roman control.

[407] The word 'normalization' itself is misleading as it suggests a return to some past state of affairs. This was the goal openly stated by the *princeps* but, since his real intentions (and whether he had a fully coherent plan) are not recoverable and the result was clearly a new institutional setting, the choice of the definition is only partially correct. Moreover, this was a process that was not only institutional but embraced all fields of Roman life from religion to culture. As a historical phenomenon, I would prefer to define the process initiated by Octavian in 29 BCE as a 'journey towards a new equilibrium'. For the sake of brevity, however, I will use the word 'normalization' (from now on without inverted commas).

The opportunities offered by this image of world conqueror were immediately exploited and used in the context of internal politics, in the struggle against Lucullus, one of the most prominent, if not the most, opponents of Pompey in 65-60 BCE. While loudly proclaiming to have been the conqueror of Persia, Pompey tried to make Lucullus appear as 'conquered' by her. The strategy worked. Lucullus' political importance faded steadily while his place was taken by other members of his party.

Things were moving fast at Rome.[408] The attention of the elite in the years between 60 and 55 BCE turned away from the East and focussed on internal politics and the western provinces. With Lucullus ousted, other powerful dynasts took centre stage, and in 60 BCE Pompey engaged in an alliance with two of them: Marcus Licinius Crassus and Julius Caesar. Competition and collaboration held them together. In 59 BCE Caesar became *de facto* (though not *de iure*) sole consul, then he obtained his provincial *imperium* in Gaul for five years. In 57 BCE he was already campaigning against the Helvetii. In 56 Pompey would become *praefectus annonae*, in 55 BCE Pompey and Crassus would be consuls again. They would then receive the command of Spain and Syria respectively, while Caesar had his mandate over Gaul extended for another five years. Against the coalition stood Cato and the group whose interests he represented (the *optimates*). They were a hindrance to the ambitions of the three but, overall, they were ineffective. The East, in the meantime, was relatively stable and firmly under the control of Pompey. His most important agent was Gabinius, consul in 57 BCE and proconsul in Syria in 56 BCE. There, operating within a Pompeian framework, he would, for three years, be very active putting down repeated Jewish revolts and planning an expedition

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[408] For a historical sketch of the period, see Sherwin-White 1994 (*CAH2*/9).

to Parthia.[409] In all this manoeuvring, there was little space for the use of Persia as a political weapon. And in fact, we hear little or nothing about her (or India). When, in 55 BCE, the Theatre – Garden – Temple complex of Pompey was inaugurated, Lucullus was dead (he died in 56 BCE), Caesar was crossing the Rhine and the Ocean and Crassus was preparing for his Parthian campaign. It is no wonder that the celebrations were more 'traditional' and focused on Pompey as the centre of the world conquered by Rome and less on the supposed conquest of the far East (India and Persia) and on the public versus private aspect.[410] Then, in 53 BCE, there was Carrhae. A dreadful event indeed which, however, was quickly overshadowed by much more urgent issues and played little part in defining the evolution of the Romans perception of Persia.

In 40 the Parthians resumed the initiative and Publius Ventidius Bassus defeated them. The victory was celebrated as the revenge for Carrhae.[411] Then, in 36 BCE it was Antony's turn to move against Parthia as agreed with Octavian in their meeting at Brundisium.[412] His campaign ended up in a failure, only partially redeemed by the success in Armenia two years later. It is by no means coincidental that it is at this point (in 35 BCE), after he had lost part of his halo of a successful military leader while Octavian had finally managed to consolidate his power in Italy and gained some military kudos (in Illiria and against Sextus Pompeus), that the campaign of 'easternization' (more precisely, 'Egyptization') of Antony escalates.[413] It will continue until 31 BCE (when Antony and

[409] Sherwin-White (*CAH2/9*) 1994: 273.
[410] Plut *Pomp.* 52.4, see Dio 39.38.1-4.
[411] This is the reading of Plutarch (*Ant.* 34.3), Dio Cassius (49.21.2), Valerius Maximus (6.9.9) and Tacitus (*Germ.* 37.4).
[412] On the events Pelling (*CAH2/10*) 1996: 21-24 and Sherwin-White 1984: 303-06. The agreement at Brundisium neatly divided the Roman world. Antony was recognised as the 'master' of the Roman East. He was to avenge the defeat of Crassus by carrying trough a Parthian war (App. *BC* 5.66.279, with Gabba 1970 (b 55) *ad locum*, Pelling (*CAH2/10*) 1996: 18.
[413] Some considerations on the issue in Pelling 1988: 179-80.

Octavian clash at Actium) and beyond. This is how, through the resurgence of the hostilities with Parthia and the War with Egypt (with the concomitant 'easternization' of Antony), the East made its comeback onto the ideological stage of Roman internal and foreign politics.

Actium

Actium, the conquest of Egypt and the suicide of Antony and Cleopatra is another turning point that introduces a change in the balance of power inside and outside that affects the Parthian problem and the perception of Persia. With the adversary out of the play, first and foremost, it was essential for Octavian to fill the breach opened by the civil war, to restore *concordia* among the Romans, unity throughout the empire and control over the provinces that had been the playground of Antony. This included dealing with what, up to this moment, had been one of Antony's problems (very likely Octavian was happy that Antony had this problem): the Parthians. For this reason, shortly after occupying Alexandria, Octavian moved to the East and landed in Syria. There he confirmed that the organization of the region made by Antony was sound and he deemed it expedient to leave it untouched for the most part.[414] This strategy had some downsides – the uncertainty about the loyalty of the kings and rulers who had once been linked to Antony – but it also had the advantage of granting him peace and time, the two conditions he needed the most to assure the collaboration of the local elites and obtain stability in the area. Octavian must have considered that the benefits outstripped the disadvantages. He must also have considered that it was best to avoid getting embroiled in a full-fledged

[414] The reorganization of the area is well summarized by Syme 1939: 301 ('The artful conqueror preferred to leave things as he found them'). For a less lapidary analysis: Bowersock, 1965: 42-61, Gruen 1996 (*CAH2/*10): 156-57 and Levick 1996 (*CAH2*/10): 649-50.

military campaign against Parthia, at least not immediately.[415] Thus, a diplomatic agreement was found.[416]

An amicable arrangement with Parthia, however, may not have looked too impressive. Only the perception of superior military might could guarantee the loyalty of the semi-independent neighbours and of the provinces. Similarly, stability and authority at Rome depended on successes and on the control over the army. A treaty that placed Parthia on the same level with Rome could give the impression that Octavian was not a strong enough military leader. Surely it would not be impressive enough to justify the flurry of honours decreed by the senate.[417] Thus, the suspicion arises that Octavian may have presented his achievements to the public and to the senate (carefully manoeuvred by his supporters at Rome) in an extremely favourable light so as to give the impression that he had concluded the negotiations in a much better position than his counterpart.[418] This is surely what Augustus himself suggests in the *Res Gaestae* and Dio believed.[419]

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[415] The issue of Octavian's intentions is disputed. No campaign at all: Rich 2009; other priorities: Burnt 1990: 105-07 and 460-64 and Syme 1991: 129-141 and 372-397. Sherwin-White (1984: 334, 340) suggests that Augustus decided not to fight the Parthians because it was too risky and left this advice as an inheritance to his successors. Similarly, Campbell 2002.

[416] The details of the events and of this diplomatic exchange (including the crucial circumstances of the delivery of the young hostage) are not clear, only the episode of Tiridates receives attention in our sources but, unfortunately, it is muddled and reconciliation of the reports is impossible. Main sources: Justin 42.5, Dio 51.18-20. For a narrative and a discussion of the confused sequence of events: Bivar (*CHI*3/1) 1983: 65-66, Sellwood (*CHI*3/1) 1983: 292, Sherwin-White 1984: 322-23, Rich 1990: 171, Gruen (*CAH2/10*) 1996: 158-163, Timpe 1975, Syme 1939: 289-300.

[417] Dio 51.20.1-4, Vell. 2.89.1.

[418] We know that, despite not occupying any official magistracy, Maecenas had the task to exercise tight control and look after Octavian's interests. In 31 or 30 BCE he prevented an alleged plot led by Lepidus (son of the triumvir) (Vell. Pat. 2.88, Livy *Per*. 133, App. *BC* 4.50. On this see: Crook, J. A. (*CAH2/10*) 1996: 74).

[419] Or was led to believe. The diffusion of the official version of the events, from which it appears that Octavian had had the upper hand in the Parthian negotiate, may have led Dio to misunderstand the events and (wrongly; cf. Timpe 1975) believe that Augustus received the hostage in 30 BCE (it is not openly stated so, but it is clearly implied at 51.18). On Augustus' position, *RG* 31.1; the confrontation appears to be a mix of diplomacy and threats, all backed by display of power – but here the episodes of 30 and 20 BCE are conflated.

Since we do not have the text of his letters to the senate, there is no way to determine how Octavian presented his Parthian campaign to the Roman public in 29BCE. However, an educated guess can be made. The circumstances of the honours given for the Parthian settlement as reported by Dio, the fact that it was only after the reorganization of the Near Eastern areas that peace was proclaimed and the doors of the temple of Janus were closed suggest that the subsequent settlement of the East was made to appear as an 'appendix' to the Egyptian campaign. The events from 31 to 29 BCE were all part of the same drama. [420]

This possibility finds further support in contemporary literature.[421] One may look at the *Georgics*, for example, a poem which can be read as a metaphor of the political trajectory of the *princeps* in the years 34-29 BCE and includes allusions to the civil wars and echoes of anti-Cleopatra propaganda.[422] At the beginning of the work, Octavian is presented as the saviour of Rome from the evil of civil war.[423] In book two, Virgil praises the Italian breed of *acri uiri*, hard and warlike, and the last and greatest of them, *maxime Caesar,* and pits them against the innocuous (*imbellem*) easterners (variously identified with the Parthians, the Indians or the East in general) against whom Octavian is waging war in far-away lands (*extremis … in oris*) in order to protect Rome.[424] In the third book, Octavian is at the centre of a temple on whose doors are depicted the battle of Actium

[420] Gurval 1999: 33 and Lange 2009: 90-93 have convincingly argued that Octavian wanted Actium and Alexandria to be perceived as one single endeavour.

[421] On Parthia in Latin poetry: Wissemann 1982, Sonnabend 1986: 197-227.

[422] Date of composition: between 38 and 29 BCE (Donatus 42). On Virgil as a witness see Tarrant 1997: 176-79. On the *Georgics* in their contemporary context see, Nappa 2005, Putnam 1979, Miles 1980. Ross 2016 and, Wilkinson 1969 are also useful. On single passages, see the commentaries of Mynors 1990 and Thomas 1988.

[423] 1.500-514. Other allusions to the civil wars in *Georgics*: 4.88-108 with Nappa 2005: 180.

[424] 2.167-172. The identification of the *imbellem Indum* is problematic. Surely, they represent exotic people from the East, who exactly and how the passage should be interpreted, is argument of contention: Mynors 1990 *ad locum*, Nappa 2005: 8 and 83, Miles 1980: 128, Harrison 2008, Putnam 1979: 101-04, Ross 2016: 118 and 147, Thomas 1988 (vol. 1): 189.

and a series of not well-defined battles against remote eastern enemies.[425] Finally, the poem concludes with the *princeps* as a quasi-divine protector of the empire from the multiple threats from the East. Octavian the one envied by the gods, the saviour from the civil wars, the defender, the victor-to-be, the god-to-be has transferred the thunderbolts (*fulgura / fulmina*) from Rome to the East.[426] As it can be inferred by the reading of the opening lines of the third *Georgic,* this is a process that must be understood to be continuous. In this passage, on the two doors of a fictitious temple to Augustus rising on the shore of the Mincio river, Virgil imagines scenes of war. On one door, the battle of Actium is coupled, on the same level, with the battle of August 30th at Alexandria.[427] This combined representation is subsequently juxtaposed to the sculptural decoration of the second door depicting other, vague, possibly non-existing, surely dubious, victories of Octavian in the East which, apparently, include Parthia.[428] Despite the vagueness of the verses, which leads to difficulties in the reconstruction of the sculptural decoration, the overall effect of the ekphrasis is relatively clear. The scene expands to encompass the entire East and Actium is only an event in the process that includes wars and battles against various eastern enemies. However, the poem concludes on a less belligerent note with the emphasis falling on the restoration of order (*iura dat*) and security promoted by Octavian after the bloodshed of the civil war, which included the defeat of the Nile and the admonitory 'thundering' of the Euphrates. Virgil may not be a spokesman for

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[425] 3.22-33. Cf. Nappa 2005: 120-22, Thomas 1988 (vol. 2): 44, Mynors 1990: 180-84, Miles 1980: 170-73 also Prop. 2.31.12-16. Dio 51.1 and Suet. *Aug.* 18.3.

[426] 4.560-640: *Caesar dum magnus ad altum / fulminat Euphratem bello uictorque uolentis / per populos dat iura uiamque adfectat Olympo* ('while Caesar was thundering the deep Euphrates (= Parthia) in war and, as a winner, was giving the law to the peoples who accept it willingly, and opening his way to the Olympus' Fairclough, Loeb), compare with 1.488.

[427] The *undantem bello … / Nilum* ('Nile billowing with war') refers to Alexandria and the *navali … aere columnas* ('columns clad with the bronze of the prows of the hostile fleets') refer to the *rostra* dedicated by Augustus after Actium (3.28-29).

[428] On the passage see: Thomas 1988 (vol. 2): *ad loc*. Miles 1980: 170-73, Mynors 1990: 184.

Octavian but there is a pattern in the reactions to the events of 29 BCE, and it is strikingly coherent.

Many explanations may be envisaged for the motivations behind Octavian's choice to present the facts in such way. He could have wanted to make his agreement with the Parthians look like an important achievement, or to divert the attention somewhat from the civil component of the war; perhaps he wished to add to the importance of the victory in Egypt or to recall the defeat of Antony in 36 BCE and his distribution of Roman possessions made in the 'Donation of Alexandria', or, finally, it was just a combination of all these factors. Be this as it may, the result was that the heir of Julius Caesar had simultaneously defeated the Egyptian queen, freeing Rome from the 'deadly monster', rearranged the East and, without spilling a drop of blood, settled the Parthian problem intensified by Antony's ill-omened campaign.[429] It may well be that he had a stroke of good luck with Parthia, but he managed to make the most of it.[430]

Having set the foundations for a (hopefully) solid organization of the East, Octavian 'was anxious to get beyond the memories of the Civil War and move forward'.[431]

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[429] Both the relation with Cleopatra and the lack of success in the Parthian campaign were used by Octavian against Antony. *Fatale monstrum,* Hor. *Carm.* 1.37.21. On Cleopatra as the enemy and Antony as her dupe Plut. *Ant.* 60.1, Dio. 50.1.4, and, to quote only one poet Hor. *Epod.* 9.11-12. On the 'Donation of Alexandria' Strootman 2010: 139–158. Cf. also Houby-Nielsen 1988. Note also the coins with *Asia recepta* ('Asia recovered') (RIC 276=RSC 14=BMCRE 647)**.** But recovered from whom? Cleopatra seems the most reasonable answer, since Proconsular Asia had never been threatened by Parthia. Compare with the roughly contemporary (29-27 BCE) *denarii* with *nike* standing on a prow and *quadriga* (reference to the triumph) (RIC 264; CRI 416; RSC 115; BMCRE 617-9=BMCRR Rome 4343-5/BN 98-104), and the *denarius* with the crocodile and the legend *Egypto capta* (e.g. BMCRE 650 and 652=RIC 275a/b). The message is self-explanatory: victories (Actium and Alexandria) and recovery. On lack of success in the Parthian campaign: Plut. *Ant.* 55, Dio. 50. 1.4. It is generally assumed that the attitude of Octavian changed after the battle, but this may be not completely accurate and there is evidence that the anti-Antony propaganda may have carried on even at Rome, cf. Lange 2009: 73-93 (reassessing Syme 1939: 270). The partial restoration / conservation of Antony's name after Actium (Reinhold 1988: 146-48) can be read in the same way: the memory of the defeats of the triumvir adds to the glory of the winner. Possibly, Virgil picks up this point to mock Antony's deeds in his description of the Shield of Aeneas (see *infra*).

[430] Timpe 1975: 163.

[431] Galinsky 1996: 218.

Hence, on his return to Rome, he had his moments of military glory – his triple triumph and the dedication of the Temple of Apollo in 29 and 28 BCE – then he focussed on restoration of order and on justifying his position. Thus, the extraordinary powers were returned (at least nominally) to the state and a major constitutional settlement was initiated (27 BCE). After that, he turned his attention to the problem of the unruly areas of the empire (Spain and the Alps). The return of internal *concordia* and pacification and normalization under the security granted by him are at the centre of the attention of the *princeps*. This is the task Octavian set himself to in the years following Actium. It is not surprising, then, that the impression of security and order in the East increases and there are no significant issues on the Parthian front between 29 and 20 BCE. Once again, the men of letters are of one accord. In the *Aeneid*, after the chaos of the Actian battle order returns.[432] In the description of the triumph of Augustus on the shield of Aeneas, the Euphrates is tamed (*mollior undis*).[433] There is even scope for a mocking remark on Antony's defeats.[434] Propertius, in the elegy 2.10, can make fun of his reader and allude to eastern lands, where battles and wars do not need to be waged, because they submit themselves through fear of Augustus, and allude to the Euphrates that protects the Romans from the Parthians.[435] It cannot be a coincidence that, in *Carm.* 2.9, written probably around 25 BCE, Horace exhorts his friend Valgius to cheer up and affirms that the Euphrates has been tamed.[436] There was a conversation going on among intellectuals

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[432] *Aen.* 8.714-728.
[433] The description of Augustus' triumph on the shield (8.617-691) as a development of the description of the Temple in *Georgic* 3 has long been recognised (Paratore, E. and Canali 1981: *ad loc*). On the passage: Hardie 2003: 97-110, 120-25, 336-76. Gurval 1999: 209-47.
[434] 8.686-713 sound hyperbolic and ironic (on hyperbole in Virgil's Aeneid see Hardie 2003: 241-292, esp. 267-285, on the shield as hyperbole *idem*: 251). For a literal interpretation, see Eden 1975: 191.
[435] On the poem see: Tatum 2000, Lyne 1998 (who also underlines the humour of the poem, contra: Fedeli 2005 (vol. 2): 310-11.)
[436] Date Nisbet and Hubbard 1978: 138. 'Sing of Augustus Caesar's latest victories [trophies], of ice-bound Niphates and the Persian river rolling its waves less proudly now that' (2.9.18-24; Rudd, Loeb).

on the *princeps*' eastern politics.[437] Virgil and Propertius seem to acknowledge that the situation along the banks of the Euphrates and in the East was under control, and Horace seems to agree; certainly, he is not denying it.

To summarise, official propaganda, literary and historiographic evidence suggest that Actium, Alexandria and the settling of the eastern affairs in the aftermaths of Actium are a *unicum*, a series of episodes in a necessary war caused by the disturbance of the order caused by the ambitions of the Egyptian queen. They imply that the settlement with the Arsacids was part of this process and Rome's position of strength with respect to Parthia had been obtained by Caesar thanks to the *auctoritas* produced by his successes against Cleopatra. From this it could be demonstrated that constant warfare, which had lasted for decades, had finally reached its end. Virgil and Horace, although much less assertive than Dio about obtained conquest (lacking the benefit of hindsight) and much more imaginative about potential ones, suggest security and superiority over the East and conceive Actium as an episode in the process of the restoration of peace, order and respect for Roman *mores* to the empire. The role of Octavian was to clear up chaos. He did so brilliantly and the East, in the ensuing years, was an oasis of peace.

The revival of the Persian Wars and the Parthians

But in all this, what is the place of Achaemenid Persia and of the revival of the Persian Wars mentioned at the beginning of this chapter? The standard answer would be that since the Romans were aware the Indo-Iranian origins of the Arsacids and of the

[437] The *Ode* presents various intentional affinities to Virg. *Georg* 3.25f-33. See: Mynors 1990: 184, Paratore, and Canali 1981: 311, Tatum 2000 and Nisbet and Hubbard 1978: 148. On influences between the two poets see also Hor. *Carm.* 3.4.35 with Hubbard and Nisbet 1978: 137 and *Aen*. 8.726. Seager (1980: 110-111 and n. 31) denies encomiastic purposes or expectations of imminent conquest of Parthia. He interprets Virgil's poem as panegyric and Horace's as a critique of Augustus' inactivity.

significance of the Persian Wars in the collective memory of the Greeks, they built an association between the Parthians and the Achaemenids with a precise ideological goal.[438] Thus, through the identification of the Parthians with Persians an implicit association between Rome and Greece/Athens would be suggested. Since Greece had won over Persia, Rome, to some degree, would be destined to win over Parthia. Because the victory of the Greeks is an established reality, the fact that this has not happened yet would appear as almost irrelevant. The problem with this reading is that, at least for the period 40-20 BCE, it is not supported by any (even fanciful) ideological or ethnological coherence. None, or very little, of the evidence provided is consistent with a perceived identity between Parthians and Persians that goes beyond the geographical coincidence. Let us examine the evidence.

The assimilation of Medes and Parthians.

One of the strongest clues in favour of the supposed identification of the Parthians with the Achaemenid Persians is the tendency to use the ethnic determinative Medes or Persians (*Medi* Gr. *Μῆδοι* or *Persae* Gr. *Πέρσαι*) as synonyms for Parthians (*Parthi* Gr. *Πάρθοι*). Tony Spawforth call this equation 'almost a cultural reflex' which would have become even more embedded in the consciousness of the Romans after Carrhae when

[438] To this the Romans added what they had learned from experience on the battlefield (their military technique) and general stereotypes about the Orientals. Origins: Hor. *Carm.* 4.14.41-43, Curt. 6.2.14, Mela 3.33, Hor. *Carm*. 4.5.25, Luc. *BC* 8.302, 8.353, 8.368-369, 2.553, Scythian origin Just. 41.1-2, Amm. Marc. 31.2.20. Military technique: Sall. *Cat.* 2.6, Virg. *Buc.* 10.59-60, Virg. *Georg*. 3.31, 4.290 and 4.313-14, Virg. *Aen*. 12.857-58, Hor. *Sat.* 2.1.15, Hor. *Carm.* 1.19.11-12, Hor. *Carm*. 2.13.17-18, Hor. *Carm.* 3.16.6, Prop. 3.9.54, Prop. 4.3.36, Ovid. *Ars. am.* 1.209-1 and 3.786, Ovid. *Rem. Am.* 155-57, Ovid. *Fasti* 5.851-82, 591-93; and later: Pers. 5.4, Luc. 1.230 and 6.50, Stat. *Sil.* 10.11-12, Stat. *Theb*. 6.597, Stat. *Silv*. 4.4.30-31, Sen. *Ep*. 36.7, Sen. *Phoen*. 428-90, *Oed.* 118-19, Sen. *Phaedr.* 816, Sen. *Med.* 710, Sen. *Thyest.* 383-84, Sen. *H Oet.* 159-61, Florus 1.46 ff., Florus 2.19, Justin 41.2.

the Parthians seemed to have the upper-hand and being the 'Greek' would have placed the Romans in the position of the 'barrier against the barbarians'.[439]

Little can be inferred from the passage in Cicero where, for the first time, Persians is used to identify the Parthians.[440] *Persas* is a hyperbole in a list of more or less exotic places to make the rapacity of the consuls and the guilt of Clodius look greater. Horace uses the ethnic definitions *Medi* and *Persae* to indicate the Parthians very frequently (sometimes clearly, sometimes less so). It is true he may have used the term Medes in a derogative sense relating to the Greek idea of Persian weakness and effeminacy. But there is no evidence of any ideological coherence in Horace. He never gives any suggestion as to why the Parthians should be considered the successors of the Achaemenids, or why they should be connected to them on cultural, historical or ethnic grounds. He never mentions those that had been, or would become, the most distinctive features of the Persians (e.g. *proskynesis*, hubris, cruelty). Similarly, the might of Parthia and the extension of her empire, a very distinctive feature that differentiates her from the other eastern kingdoms, are never associated with the Achaemenids, as it will be in Pliny.[441] Furthermore, features such as weakness and effeminacy, just as luxury and debauchery, are not peculiar to the Achaemenids or the Persians but characterize the entire East. And, after the arrival of Rome and decades of reduced political importance of Athens, the automatic connection Persia = Asia = barbarian had become much more

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[439] Spawforth 1994: 249 (reflex); see also: Wissemann 1982: 24-26, Shayegan 2011: 336, Schneider 1998: 110-13, Schneider 2007: 84n91.
[440] *Dom.* 60.
[441] *NH* 6.1.

nuanced, surely not so compelling as it may have been in Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries.[442]

Let us look at some relevant passages. When Horace writes: 'I would be richer than the king of Persia' (*Carm.* 3.9.4), we do not need to think of a complex subtext including the struggle between Persia and Greece to explain what had been a commonplace from Plautus' time. Horace could have been thinking of any Persian / Achaemenid king without implying any connection with Parthia. In the face of coherence (although it might not be fair to search for coherence in poetry) in another poem, *Carmen* 3.6, the Parthians (more specifically the two generals Monase and Pacorus) are 'poor' (*exiguis torquibus*), while the Romans are degenerate. There is obviously an intentional paradox; the corruption of Rome makes the degeneration of Parthia seem a virtue. But it would be wrong to focus on Persian debauchery. The point of the Ode is that the Romans decayed so much that the Parthians defeated them. In other words, the Parthians are a term of comparison for Roman weakness, not for Roman decadence or wealth. In *Carmen* 3.8, the allusions to the internal difficulties of the Parthians are typical of the Parthians and have nothing to do with the Achaemenids.[443]

Some further examples. Horace in two poems compares the kings of Parthia with Cyrus to signal their inadequacy; yet, again, this adds little to the parallel Parthians / Achaemenids.[444] Cyrus' exemplarity is another rhetorical commonplace and does not

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[442] The Persian Wars are 'common currency' in the 'early and middle Hellenistic period' (Priestly 2014: 158 and 162), then the importance of the theme seems to fade from the middle of the second century BCE until the revival of the first three centuries of the Common Era (Almagor 2017: 327 text and n2). On how Persian War memories were adapted and manipulated within Greek mainland to create alliances and identities, sometimes conflicting sometimes shared, see Alcock 2002: 74-86.

[443] 3.8.19-20 *Medus infestus sibi luctuosis / dissidentis armis* ('Your enemy, the Medes, are torn apart by a war')). The Medes are fighting a civil war, internal problems among the Achaemenids, if we look at the commonplace, are usually related to familiar intrigues.

[444] *Carm.* 2.2.17, 3.29.27-28.

imply a consistent theory of Parthian origin.[445] The point of *Carmen* 2.2 is that Fraates, who now sits on the throne that once belonged to Cyrus, is interested in riches and therefore will be unhappy. We may assume (but Horace does not say so) that Cyrus was happier because he was an example of virtue, and consequently, Fraates would be a Cyrus in decline. The state of decadence of Parthia would then be the result of a long process of steady deterioration stretching back to Cyrus. But this reading does not relate to the context: the main point here is the right and moderate use of wealth (2.2.3-4, *temperato usu*), not decadence. Since virtue grants true kingship only to those who disregard riches, Fraates cannot be considered happy (or rich, the double meaning is intentional), and in fact his power is precarious (*Redditum … Phraatem*). Cyrus is the example of virtue, which in turn grants the stability of his power (*diadema tutum*) to which the greed of Fraates, and its consequences, can be compared. The geographic coincidence is obviously intentional but does not imply a consistent theory about the Parthian origin or an uninterrupted thread from Cyrus to Fraates. Finally, moving to *Carmen* 3.29, the point of the lines 27-29 is that Maecenas is worrying about issues that are irrelevant because they are too distant (that is why Horace mentions Bactria, the furthermost satrapy of the Persian Empire, but for many years also a Greek-Asian independent kingdom). If Horace meant Parthia, would it have made sense for Maecenas not to worry about her, given that Horace urges Augustus to conquer Parthia at every occasion he has? Bactria is a geographical hyperbole, not a moral or geopolitical consideration.

[445] E.g.: Cic. *Rep*. 1.43, Nep. *Reges* 1.2-3, Cic. *QFr.* 1.

This is not to utterly deny the occasional intentional correlation Parthians – Medes – Persians, but to suggest caution in making complex inferences, especially in connection to elaborate ideological constructs from what may be a simple association based on geographical coincidence and/or a poetic convention.[446] That Horace knew well the difference between the Achaemenid Empire and the Parthian Empire and suggested on more than one occasion that the former was the antecedent of, and superior to, the latter, amounts to stretching the truth. It seems more appropriate to say that at the time Horace and Virgil were writing, an association Parthia – Achaemenid Persia (and its cultural implications) was, at best, in the making.

A second reason for the assimilation of the Achaemenids to the Parthians, which also would imply intentionality, it has been suggested, is that it would have reduced the impact of the defeat at Carrhae.[447] There is, however, little if any, evidence that the Persian Wars were used as a symbol of success after Crassus' defeat. It has already been noted that until the preparations of Caesar the defeat of Crassus did not provoke as much interest as later writers seem to suggest and there is no record whatsoever of a revival of Persian Wars in Julius Caesar's projects, or in Antony's campaign. If there had been any such ideas, one expects, it would have surfaced during one of Antony's stays in Athens. But nothing suggests so. If the connection Persian Wars – Parthian Wars was so obvious, why did Athens (Athens, the cradle of anti-Persianism!) not revitalize the concept, neither in relation with the victory of Ventidius Bassus nor in the perspective of Antony's campaign (Antony received the news of Ventidius' first victory while in Athens and was there before launching his Parthian campaign)? Nor is there any record of

[446] We can compare this with the nickname 'Huns' given by the British to the Germans during WWI.
[447] Spawforth 1994.

anything like that even in the surviving sarcastic responses of Octavian to Antony's letters.[448] Based on the evidence available, it seems to me that neither the Athenians, nor Antony had attempted to connect any episode of the war against the Parthians with the Persian Wars. As mentioned, the memory of Carrhae was re-elaborated and used to justify Augustus' Parthian policy after Actium, not to reduce the impact of the defeat.

A third reason adduced for the parallel Parthians – Achaemenid Persians is that the Parthians had already linked themselves to the Achaemenids. If this is true for the *principate* of Tiberius (as an ambassador overtly proclaims in Tacitus), it seems that it may not be so for the Late-Republican period.[449] Thus, if the 'Achaemenid equal Parthians' relation existed in Rome before 11 CE this was not because of the influence of Arsacids ideology. Moreover, regardless of the intentions of the Parthians, nothing in the sources, as far as my knowledge goes, suggests that the Romans or the Greeks may have detected any continuity, real or simply perceived, between the two Iranian empires.

Up to this point Parthia is just Parthia, an eastern kingdom that interacts with Rome, perhaps perceived as a powerful and fearsome enemy. Even when, in the last years of the thirties BCE, Horace's attitude shifts from acceptance to impatience (whatever the reason for that), the Parthians matter only insofar as they could be used in relation to Augustan normalization. This is nowhere more evident than in *Roman Odes*, where Horace consistently develops the idea that Rome's defeats in the East were the

[448] Plut. *Ant*. 55.1-4, Suet. *Aug.* 69.2, Dio 50. 1.3-2.2.

[449] Tac. *Ann.* 6.31. The issue is disputed but prudent / no continuity stance seems to prevail. For continuity: Wolski 1966: 72-6 and 79-81 (referring only to the cultural aspect, cf. also Wolski 1976 also Dąbrowa 2014). Against: Fowler 2005, Bickerman (1983: 20 who sees the Parthians as a philhellenic kingdom). Prudent are: Frye (1962: 206, 212-16 and 1984: 228-29), Sonnabend 1986: 281n85, Schneider 1998: 110-13 and 2007: 70 text and n91, Shayegan 2011: 39-331 esp. 311-331 and 332-36 text and n14. On the early years of the Arsacids, Commagene and Pontic revival of Achaemenid traditions, see Shayegan 2016.

result of un-Roman behaviour and themes such as world conquest and the urgency to triumph over Parthia are combined with religious and moral considerations.[450] The pious Octavian had brought under control and kept 'quiet' the Arsacids, but now that there is Augustus, who guarantees that tradition, *pietas* and mores are upheld, it is time to act and set the issue straight.[451] Therefore, for example, a young man must be brought up to be a valiant soldier, trained in fighting the Parthians.[452] The Parthians had been an enemy who had managed to create problems only because of the Romans' faults, whether because of Crassus' stupidity and impiety, Antony's *impietas* and barbarization, or Roman impurity.[453] Now, the conquest of their land and of the entire *oikoumene* can be considered a relatively easy task, so easy that sometimes it is perceived as already accomplished.

Actium and the Achaemenids. The association between the war against Cleopatra and the Persian Wars.

The second instance in which Persia seems to be relevant to the events unfolding between 34 and 29 BCE, is in the context of the mythologization / celebration of the battle of Actium and the characterization of Cleopatra as the oriental enemy.[454] In order to emphasise its epochal importance, it has been suggested, the battle was soon equated to the Battle of Salamis.[455] The link between the two naval battles has been proposed for

[450] The issue has been widely discussed (Wissemann 1982, Seager 1980, Sonnabend 1986: 197-227). The dating of the *Roman Odes* is complicated, *terminus post quem* for at least *Carm.* 3 and 5 is 27 BCE. On the issue, Nisbett and Rudd 2004: xix-xx.
[451] *Carm.* 3.3, 3.5.
[452] *Carm.* 3.2.
[453] Crassus had been stupid (Cic. *De Divinatione* 2.9, Val. Max. 1.6.11) or *impius* (Plut. *Crass.* 16, Dio 40.12-13, Josephus *AJ* 14.72), Antony and his men *impii* (Hor. *Carm*. 3.6.9-16).
[454] Hardie 2007.
[455] See note 390.

several reasons. The strongest is probably the *naumachia* staged in Rome in 2 BCE (about its meaning, see *infra*) but other clues, contemporary to the events, have been detected. For example, the interest in mythical battles which had been used as metaphors for the defence of civilization against the invading barbarians. Since Amazonomachies, Gigantomachies and Titanomachies were frequently used in the iconographic programme of the Athenian Acropolis which glorified the victory over Persia in the fifth century BCE – so the reasoning goes – choosing any of these themes would mean employing an iconographic code that had been used to represent the struggle East – West whose historical prototype was the Persian Wars.

Under careful scrutiny, the two events do not appear to be so closely associated. If Actium had been so promptly compared to Salamis, the first place where one would expect to find allusions is the city of Nicopolis in Epirus and its memorial. Not long after the victory of Actium, in accordance with a long-lasting Hellenistic tradition, Octavian founded a commemorative city near the site of the battle which he named Nicopolis.[456] On his orders, quinquennial games where established and, on the nearby hill, where his camp had stood, an imposing memorial was erected which has been the object of recent interest and investigation.[457] The impressive construction, which combines the features of a trophy and of a sanctuary (to Mars, Neptune and Apollo) while mixing Hellenistic and Roman Republican motives, was decorated with two statues portraying a local peasant

[456] Suet. *Aug.* 18.2, Dio. 51.1.3.

[457] Murray and Petsas 1989, Zachos 2001, 2003. Date of foundation of the city: 30 BCE (Cassiodorus *Chron. Min.* 2.134 and Jerome *Chronicon* 245F(f)), Murray and Petsas 1989: 126-27). Possible inauguration of the city and monument: 29 BCE (Murray and Petsas 1989: 127-30). Date of the inscription on monument: between January 29 and January 27 (Zachos 2003: 76). The date of the first games (*Actia*) varies between 29 and 27 BCE (Murray and Petsas 1989: 128-29 and Gurval 1995: 74-77 with discussion and bibliography); on their being a model for other festivals in the eastern Mediterranean: Gurval 1995: 78-81.

called Nikon and his ass Eutychos, a frieze depicting ships and maritime accessories, perhaps an Amazonomachy, weapons and a procession, probably representing the triumph of 29 BCE, and other statues of which only the bases survive (one decorated with an Amazonomachy). It also prominently featured bronze ship rams, meant to celebrate the battle at sea and a commemorative inscription c. 48 m long.[458]

The ideological meaning of the sculptural decorations is difficult to assess. The statues of Nikon and Eutychos, we know from the literary sources, allude to a favourable omen but little more can be said of the frieze and the basis of statues except that they appear to be coherent with the symbolic representation of Octavian victory as restoration of peace known from monuments at Rome.[459] More importantly, the text of the inscription clearly defines the monument as a celebration of the return of peace (*parta pax*) obtained through victories not only at sea (*marique, Neptunoque*) but also on land (*terra, Marti*) by a pious Roman general driven by a just cause, virtue and the support of the gods.[460] The monument was not only meant to glorify the battle of Actium but also

[458] At the cost of entering the domain of pure speculation, I wonder if the different choice of rams for the Forum Romanum and the Memorial (small at Rome, large at Nicopolis) might be motivated by other reasons than traditional constraints. If the rams of the memorial and the ships in the *neoria* (in the harbour of Nicopolis) included samples from all the enemy ships (Murray and Petsas 1989: 116), they may have included specimens from both fleets (of Antony and Cleopatra). By contrast, the rams in the forum and the *navalis columnas,* of smaller size (Murray and Petsas 1989: 121-24), could have been only from Cleopatra's fleet (the larger ships seem to have been part of Antony's squadron). This would be in line with the identification of Cleopatra as the *hostes* and the prudent attitude of Octavian with respect to the memory of Antony at Rome. Moreover, if Cleopatra managed to escape with all her fleet (if Orosius (6.19.9, 11) is right and Cleopatra had 60 ships, and Plutarch says that 60 flew with her (*Ant.* 66.3-5)) this means that Octavian may have brought some Egyptian rams from elsewhere (Alexandria?) to decorate the monuments. Were this true, it would confirm that Augustus was very well aware of the symbolic use he could make of these objects and that he had a different way to present his victories in the East and at Rome. On *Rostra* in the forum: Coarelli 1985: 244-57, Purcell 1995a and 1995b. Bronze columns with ship's prows: Serv. *Ad Georg.* 3.29 – Coarelli does not mention them but see Zanker 1988: 80-81. Cf. Dio 51.1 with Murray and Petsas 1989: 121. On the reconstruction of the eastern part of the Forum under Augustus, Dio 51.19.1 cf. Coarelli 1985: 308-24.

[459] Zachos (2007: 92-98): 'the monument would be a 'precursor of the Ara Pacis itself' (92). On the statues: Plut. *Ant.* 65.3 and Suet. *Aug.* 96.2.

[460] Note also the base decorated with a sculpture representing the gods including an Apollo citaedro, a symbol of peace (Zachos 2003: 89). The most recent reconstruction of the inscription is in Murray and Petsas 1989: 62-77 with bibliography and illustrations.

the entire process of pacification.[461] It is significant, therefore, that it presents a balanced mixture of Latin and Greek features in the structure and decoration and, it must be noted, had its inscription written in Latin.[462] Since Nicopolis was in many respects (if not all) a Greek city (albeit, possibly, with a significant number of Latin speaking veterans), with Greek institutions and inscriptions, one may suspect, the memorial was there not only for the benefit of the local population.[463] A Roman or Italian would have seen pacification through victory and the restoration of the Republic by Caesar's son.[464] A Greek or Asian Greek may well have interpreted the monument as a way of displaying Octavian's intention to forgive the Greeks for siding with Antony while reminding them which triumvir had won. In both instances the message is consistent: conciliation and unity from power. Once again Octavian seems to have been eager to move forward and to send out an inclusive message rather than linger on the details of his victory in the Adriatic Sea. If this reconstruction and its implications are correct, it would not be surprising if Salamis (or even Athenian elements) were nowhere to be found; they simply would not fit with the message. The only isolated possible reference to the Persian Wars is the presence of the frieze with the Amazonomachy.[465] However, its existence relies on a very tentative

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[461] Murray and Petsas 1989: 137-39.

[462] Murray and Petsas 1989: 115-24, Lange 2009: 111-14.

[463] The habit of founding victory cities recalls Hellenistic, and more specifically, Alexandrian rather than Roman prototypes. *Actia Nicopolis* (*Νικόπολις* 'the city of victory') was founded by synoecism (Pausanias 7.18.9, Strabo 7.7.6); not a peculiarly Roman habit. On this: Purcell 1987: 77-78. Octavian also picked up local traditions when he set up the Actian games and the cult of Apollo may have been suggested by the presence of a shrine of the god in the area. Whether the city had an eminently Greek population or a dual community (Roman / Greek) is disputed (dual: Purcell 1987, Gurval 1995: 69, Lange 2009: 106; essentially Greek: Bowersock 1965: 94).

[464] See Lange 2009: 120-23 who interprets the monument as directed to a Roman public.

[465] On the myth of the defence of Athens from the invading force of the Amazons see Justin 2.4.26-30, Diod. 4.28. On its re-use as a metaphor of Athens' role in the defence of Greece against Persia (e.g.: in the paintings of the Stoa Poikile and on the Shield of Athena Parthenos), see Castriota 1992: 46-47, 77-78, 83-89, Harrison 1981: 294-311. Tarbell 1920, Stewart 1995: 580-87 and Woodford 2003: 142-43 are more prudent in their assessment and highlight the complexity and multifariousness of the set of ideas brought forth by the representation of the Amazons in Athens in the fifth and fourth century. Isocrates *Paneg.* 67-70, *Archidamus* 42, *Aeropagiticus* 75. Demosthenes 40.8, Paus. 4.31.8.

reconstruction hinging on one single fragment based on the (reasonable but unsubstantiated) assumption that there was a connection between Amazonomachies and Actium on monuments at Rome. And, as the author of the preliminary report admits, there are other possible interpretations of the fragment.[466]

The building programme at Rome is similarly poor in evidence for the equation Salamis = Actium. In the temple of Apollo on the Palatine, another monument that mixed the idea of victory with the celebration of peace, Egypt and Antony were obliquely recalled by the statues of the Danaids and the relief of Heracles' and Apollo's dispute over the Delphic tripod.[467] Persia and Salamis are utterly ignored.[468]

More interesting is the Temple of Apollo Sosianus, the former temple of Apollo Medicus in the Campus Martius. Gaius Sosius had started rebuilding the temple before the conflict between Octavian and Antony erupted. In 32 BCE he fled to Alexandria after a contest with Octavian in the Senate, once the hostilities ended, he was pardoned and brought the project to completion in Augustus' name.[469] The extensive restoration that was probably completed after 25 BCE, included the positioning of a frieze representing Augustus' triple triumph in 29 BCE along the walls and the decoration of the pediment with a group of sculptures representing an Amazonomachy (an original Greek group transported to Rome possibly from Eretria).[470] The oriental feminine warriors fighting against the Greeks are almost surely an allusion to Cleopatra and Egypt and consequently

[466] This is the situation until the publication of a full report of the excavation is made. Cf. Zachos 2003. On Amazonomachies at Rome, see *infra*.
[467] On the temple Galinsky 1996: 213-24.
[468] On the celebration of Actium made without mentioning the defeated ones see Zanker 1988: 82-85.
[469] On the temple and its pediment see La Rocca, 1985 and Viscogliosi 1995: 49-54 (entry: *Apollo Aedes in Circo*). For an update on the reconstruction see: Cirucci 2005: 20-24.
[470] La Rocca 1985: 19-20 (restoration), 94-96 (decoration). Date: Viscogliosi 1995: 51.

to the Battle of Actium.[471] Because it is quite probable that Sosius paid his debt of gratitude for the pardon granted to him by following Octavian's instructions, there would be solid enough basis to affirm that the theme had been adopted as part of the official propaganda by Octavian, provided that the supposed presence of an Amazonomachy decorating the Actian memorial should be proved correct.[472] Yet, although embedded in the idea of the fight with the Amazons there is also the memory of the Persian Wars, the same 'code' had often been used to represent several other concepts. Mythical clashes with alien figures were used to allude to many subsequent encounters with the barbarians which had in turn become epochal achievements worth remembering in their own right.[473] Not to mention the exceptions, such as the Amazonomachy decorating the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, a funerary monument of an Hellenised satrap of the Persian empire. An unseemly place for a powerful symbol of Persian defeat. Moreover, very recently, Pompey had revived the strong link between these warrior-women, Pontus and the areas of the Northern Caspian Sea and the Caucasus, all parts of Mithridates VI's empire, by parading them in his world triumph.[474] An association, this of the Amazons and Pontus, furthermore intensified by Mithridates' relation with a vigorous and stalwart warrior-woman.[475] Pompey's audience would have been reminded that the Amazons

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[471] La Rocca 1985: 89-90.
[472] There is no way to ascertain to what extent Octavian may have interfered with the practicalities of the restoration, it is undeniable, however, that the architect's iconographic project aligns with the monuments commissioned by the emperor. On Amazons as a proxy for Persians see Zanker 1988: 84 and Hardie 2007: 130. Zanker, however, does not imply that Amazons correspond to Persians, he says that some compared the victory of Actium 'with that of the Athenians over the Amazons or the Persians'.
[473] The most relevant are the defeat of the Gauls of Brennus in 279 BCE and the defeat of the Galatians in 240 BCE. It is interesting that, according to Coarelli (1978: 234) the statues of the Dying Gaul (copy of the Pergamene group) may have been commissioned by Caesar (Julius) to commemorate his Gallic victory. If so, the Gallic element, at least in this circumstance, has clearly overwhelmed the Persian. The Amazons were not so remote after all as they were the symbol of some cities in Asia Minor.
[474] On the homeland of the Amazons according to Greek myths see Mayor 2014: 41-51.
[475] Hypsicratea, Val. Max. 4.6.2, Plut. *Pomp.* 32.

were much more closely related to the Scythians than to the Persians and, more relevantly, of the legend of Alexander and Thalestris.[476] Thus, a cultured Roman or Greek could have thought that the Persians were sometimes associated with the Amazons, but would have known that they also stood for a more complex and comprehensive idea of the eastern enemy. Which of these alternative associations were the most relevant?[477] In this context their gender may be the key factor. Amazons would probably mean something like 'barbarian and feminine' – so an apt allusion to Cleopatra – rather than specifically Persian.[478] In short, it seems unlikely that the choice of the decoration created or reflected a conscious (or unconscious) link between Actium, the Persian Wars and the Parthians as enemies on one side and on Egypt on the other. Admittedly, the fact that Cleopatra was an oriental queen and the Parthians an oriental empire brought about ideas which may have coincided with the arguments adopted by the Greeks in their clash with the Persians. However, the demonization of Cleopatra as an eastern barbarian did not need to bring Persia into the picture. Egypt, despite its Hellenistic ruling dynasty, was barbarian and exotic enough to endow the queen with sufficient otherness.[479]

More mythical battles between civilised and barbarian peoples, between the Roman and (primitive) Egyptian gods, appear in Virgil's descriptions of the Battle of Actium on the shield of Aeneas.[480] Philip Hardie has dedicated important pages to this representation and its models. He suggests that Virgil, by describing it in a manner that is intentionally reminiscent of the great clashes of Giants and Gods, transposes the event

[476] Diod. 17.75-77, Curtius 6.5.24-32, Plut. *Alex*. 46
[477] Cf. La Rocca 1985: 89-96, Mayor 2014, 280-286. On the re-use of the theme of Amazonomachy in Roman times see: Russenberger 2014: 85-112.
[478] For an analysis of the relationship between this monument and gender, cf. Kellum 1997.
[479] Cf. *sistrum* vs *tuba* Hor. *Carm*. 1.37.7, Virg. *Aen*. 8.696, Prop. 3.11.43. Roman vs Egyptian gods *Aen*. 698-701, Prop. 3.11.41.
[480] Virg. *Aen*. 8.686-713, Gurval 1999: 230-247.

to a cosmic (and divine) level.[481] In an article published in 2007, he refined his argument suggesting that the Amazonomachy and Gigantomachy on the shield of Athena in the Parthenon may have inspired Vigil and that the analogies between the Gigantomachy and the battle of Actium in the *Aeneid* (8.652-662), point not only to the defence of Greece from the barbarians, but specifically to the Athenian model of the Persian Wars (rather than to the successive Pergamene adaptation as he had previously proposed).[482] He also detected important parallels and subtle connections between the three main feminine characters Dido, Cleopatra and Camilla – whom he considers to be 'firmly associated' with the Parthians – Actium and the Greek victory at Salamis.[483]

One may argue that, the feminine associations may be simpler than Hardie suggests. Camilla is an eastern barbarian woman warrior of Italian stock fighting eastern invaders destined to become Italians. She blends characteristics proper of the Amazons, the Parthians, the Italians, the Egyptians and yes even (to a certain extent) the Achaemenids. However, her depiction brings about questions of identity and points to the difficult coexistence of attraction to and repulsion for, the 'other' rather than creating a parallel between Parthia and Persian Wars with the purpose of elaborating a parallel between the Greek and the Roman victories.[484] Moreover, as mentioned, Amazons do not always necessarily correspond to the Persians, let alone to the Parthians. In fact, Amazons had been depicted throwing arrows 'Parthian style' since 550 BCE, and some of these representations are to be found in Etruscan funerary pottery.[485]

[481] Hardie 2003.
[482] Hardie 2007. Cf. Hardie 2003: 124-37.
[483] Hardie 2007: 139.
[484] On Camilla: Boyd, 1992.
[485] Mayor 2014: 175.

Before returning to the battle, its description on the shield forged by Volcano and the supposed implicit Athenian model of the Persian Wars, let us note that Virgil changed his approach to the events of 30-29 BCE. He transformed the victory over Egypt from just an element in the process of pacification to a discrete event of epochal proportions, the culmination of a myth-historic process in which all clashes converge onto Actium.[486] In this all-comprehensive episode, there was room for all the other struggles in defence of civilization, including the Persian Wars. Yet, even if Virgil took inspiration from the shield of Athena – in which case he would have revealed a nexus with the Persian Wars that had not been made before – what he surely did not do was to expand this (hypothetical) network of connections to include the Parthians.[487] The elements of the analogy are Cleopatra, the East and the feminine.

In short, in the years leading to Actium and the following decade, nothing suggests a significant connection between Parthia and Achaemenid Persia, or the Persian Wars. The 'eastern character' of the Iranians is marginal or almost absent in the examples we have seen, its definition (luxury, wealth, treacherousness) so generic that could be applied to any oriental entity (Egypt, for example) and had been attached to all the past enemies of Rome (Hannibal, Mithridates, etc.). The degeneration of the Romans in *Carmina* 3.6 and 3.3 is more reminiscent of the polarity Octavian/Rome vs Cleopatra (Antony)/Egypt than of Persia or Greek perception of the Persians. There is also little to support the idea that the battle of Actium could have been perceived as a second Salamis

[486] Gurval 1999: 246.

[487] Hardie's elegant attempt (2007: 139-41) to connect *Odes* 1.37 and 1.38, the battle of Actium, Salamis, and the victory over Parthia rests on the assumption that the events in the East in 30 BCE were perceived as a victory over the Parthians and on the ambiguous use of Persians and Medes for Parthians. Something I believe has already been refuted. It may be worth noting that this is the opposite of what Virgil had claimed in the *Georgics.*

and surely nothing connects Actium to the Parthians via the Persian Wars.[488] Octavian did not allude to a victory over Parthia through the Persian Wars. He just added the eastern settlement to the list of his achievements in 29 BCE. There is only one context in which this connection may have been made, and this is obviously the Parthian settlement of 20 BCE.

2. The Parthian settlement of 20BCE.

The return of the standards.

After the uncertainties of the mid-twenties Octavian's Parthian strategy paid off. An agreement to return the standards and the prisoners was reached in 23 BCE, and then, after a period of tension in Armenia, the *signa* and the hostages were, with a little delay, finally delivered to Tiberius in 20 BCE.[489] On the internal front the event offered the *princeps* a second (and much more effective than in 30 BCE) opportunity to advertise a success. The recovery was immediately presented as substantial progress in the process of pacification announced in 27 BCE, a major step ahead towards world rule and a prerequisite to the final proclamation of the beginning of a new era.[490] It is no wonder that Augustus gave a preeminent position to the settlement of the Parthian affair in his building projects and in his memoirs.

[488] Hölscher (1984) has identified a series of reliefs representing Salamis as a metaphor for Actium. However, these objects reproducing images of Nike and Athena, modelled on the images of the same deities produced to celebrate the battle of Salamis that he dates to the immediate aftermaths of Actium, could have been produced a decade or more later. Therefore, they may have become fashionable at Rome at some point after 20 BCE, when the programme of appropriation of Greek past had already begun (see *infra*).

[489] Suet. *Tib.* 9.1.

[490] Dio. 53.12, Strabo 17.3.25 (C840), Suet. *Aug.* 47.

The senate promptly decreed several honours. First, they ordered that a small temple should be built on the Capitoline hill dedicated to *Mars Ultor*, where the *signa* just recovered would be placed. This temple was to be situated between two significant buildings: the Temple of *Jupiter Tonans* and the Temple of *Jupiter Feretrius* (where the *spolia opima* obtained by Romulus and Marcellus were kept).[491] Second, coins were struck representing the small Temple of Mars *Ultor*.[492] Third, the Senate voted a triumphal arch with three portals and statues of the Parthians handing over the *signa* and a chariot with Augustus on it.[493] Fourth, several *denarii* were produced with the motive of the kneeling barbarian and the legend '*signis receptis'*.[494]

Augustus himself contributed by commissioning some monuments and by accepting, refusing, adapting, or modifying the decisions of the senate to make them consistent with his building programme.[495] A good example is the statue from Livia's villa *ad gallinas albas,* today's Prima Porta. The sculpture, probably a copy of a bronze original, arguably on display in a public place (as many cuirassed statues), depicts Augustus in heroic posture, with a clear reference to his divine ancestry, and with a cuirass decorated with figures representing the conquered provinces or client states of Rome.[496] At the top, there are the figures of Apollo, the sun, Diana, the moon and the god *Caelus* ('sky') in an

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[491] Dio 54.8.2-4. Its existence has been accepted by many but not all scholars, for example Rich 1998: 79-97, Spannagel 1999: 79-85 and Simpson 1993 are sceptic. The date for the possible dedication (12 May 19 BCE) is also controversial (Rich 1998: 83, Simpson 1977: 91).

[492] Around 19 BCE; RIC I^2 103-106=BMCRE 371-371, 375.

[493] It is unclear whether a Parthian Arch was ever built. Sceptic Rich 1998; favourable Rose 2005. Rich (1998: 126-27) also mentions, among the honours, an altar to *Fortuna redux*, the festival of the *Augustalia* and a chariot which Augustus decided to place in his forum.

[494] Around 19 BCE; RIC I^2 287=BMCRE10.

[495] For general reconstruction and problems of interpretation of the public buildings under Augustus, see Pollini 2012: 204-17, Galinsky 1996: 141-224 and Evans 1992: 109-18. More specific: Nedergaard 1994-5: 33-70, Coarelli 1985: 258-308, Rose 2005: 21-75.

[496] If this was not a copy, it is reasonable to believe that it was placed in a public area of the villa which was used as public shrine devoted to Augustus (Reeder 1997: 303-08).

astral representation of eternity very much in tune with the words of Horace' *Carmen Saeculare* (4.6.37-40). The central scene consists of a Parthian king handing over an eagle to a military figure sometimes identified as *Mars Ultor*. Whether connected with the celebrations for the *saeculum aureum* or not this was a celebration of the victory over the Parthians intended 'as the culmination of a perfect world order'. [497]

One aspect is clear, in 19 BCE on official monuments and in official documents, the Parthians are presented as subjugated; the purpose of all this is quite clear and nobody expressed it better than Augustus himself in the *Res Gestae:*

> *Parthos trium exercitum Romanorum spolia et signa reddere mihi supplicesque amicitiam populi Romani petere coegi.*
>
> *RG*29

> 'I compelled to the Parthians to give back to me spoils and standards of three Roman armies and humbly to request the friendship of the Roman people.' (Cooley 2009)

However, although the achievement is presented emphatically as a great one, once again, there was no military victory to solemnise and the subjugation of the Parthians

[497] Zanker 1988: 189. The statue is dated to 19 BCE by Brommer (1980), to 20 BCE by Kleiner (1992: 67), who interprets the figure receiving the standards as Tiberius and the dolphin as a reference to Actium, soon after 17 by Hölscher 1988: 386. The statue represents a peaceful settlement with the Parthians for Rose (2005) and Pollini (2012: 187). Completely different reading in Simpson 2005: 82-90. For the place of discovery see Reeder 1997.

was of a peculiar kind.[498] A detail that did not escape the ancient commentators.[499] For example, if the sending of hostages to Rome appears to confirm the position of inferiority of the Parthians (this is how Augustus presents it), already Strabo, and later Tacitus, interpreted it as an attempt by the king Phraates to get rid of potential rivals.[500] Even Horace, who had filled his poems with fantasies of triumphs over the Parthians now, after the return of the *signa,* changes his tone and stops insisting on the theme of conquest.[501] Propertius, who, before 20 BCE, had always portrayed the Parthians as defeated and led in triumph, abandons the theme.[502] The only time after 20 BCE that he mentions the eastern foe is at 4.6.75-84, where he projects the triumph into the future for the adoptive children of Augustus, Gaius and Lucius, (who were still infants at the time) and acknowledges that Augustus had obtained at least a partial success by receiving the standards.[503]

The imagery associated to the Parthian is also complex and, at least to some extent, unusual. Instead of the customary images of enslavement and submission, we have the figure of the kneeling Parthian, with ethnic features markedly emphasised but without the most characteristic symbols of defeat, which include, *inter alia,* the hands tied behind the back, the presence of a trophy, the violent breaking apart of familiar bonds, the representation of the defeated as female, children and/or as enslaved.[504] The

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[498] Augustus refused a triumph (Dio Cass. 52.8.3).
[499] And baffles modern interpreters. At the opposite extremes of the matter are Rose (2005: 27) and Gruen (1990: 397).
[500] Augustus: *RG* 32. Str. 16.1.28, Tac. *Ann.* 2.1.2.
[501] Before: *Carm.* 1.12, 2.13.18, 2.9.17-24 and 3.2.43-44; after *Ep*. 1.18.54-57.
[502] Prop. 2.10.15, 3.4.12-13 and 17-18, 3.9.53-54, 4.3.67-68.
[503] For Hutchinson (2006: 168-69 and intro sect. 2) the poet alludes to a more definitive future victory which should include trophies and enemy standards. Cairns (1984: 162-64) has interpreted the ending in a different way which is much more in tune with Horace's position after 20 BCE.
[504] See images on page 160-61. For discussion of some 'standard' representations of the defeated under Augustus see Ferris 2000: 30-62, De Souza 2011: 40-44 (on prisoners as slaves), Ramsby 2007 (on subjugation and its relation to gender, age and familiar subordination), Pollini 2012: 184 (on bounds).

issue is further complicated by the association of, and confusion between, the Parthians and one of the most distinctive myths of the Augustan Age: the Trojan origin of Rome through Iulus/Ascanius, often represented as a handsome oriental wearing exotic outfit.[505]

Photo 1

Male and female barbarians bound beneath a trophy.
West wall of the Trophy des Alpes. France.

[505] Schneider 2007. Schneider 2012, Torelli 1999: 24-25, Miller 1995, Rose 2002, Persian costume, see Smith 1994: 128.

Photo 2

This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-SA
Gemma Augustea (Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien IX.a.79) representing the imperial family (above) and two couples of defeated barbarians dragged towards and in the process of being bound to a trophy (below).

Roman representation of the defeated enemy was unambiguous. Roman superiority had to be affirmed without uncertainties. And there is no stronger image of defeat and subjugation than the triumph and the symbols connected to it. But since the idea of total subjugation had disappeared or had been removed (from poetry, from official records, from images and from coins), how was then the superiority of Rome justified? Horace formulates the best answer to this question in the *Carmen Saeculare*:

the fear of the Parthians and the obeisance of the Indians are the prerequisite for the peace and prosperity of the world under the aegis of the *princeps:*[506]

iam mari terraque manus potentis
Medus Albanasque ***timet*** *secures,*
iam Scythiae ***responsa petunt****, superbi*
nuper et Indi.
iam Fides et Pax et Honor Pudorque
priscus et neglecta redire Virtus
audet, adparetque beata pleno
copia cornu.

Carmen Saeculare 54-60

Now the Mede **fear** our mighty hand and the axes of Alba that are powerful over land and sea; now the Scythians and the Indians, who were recently so arrogant, **ask for our decision**. Now Good Faith, Peace and Honour, along with old-fashioned Modesty and Virtue, who has been so long neglected, venture to return, and blessed plenty with her full horn is seen by all. (Rudd, Loeb)

Defeat has been replaced by fear and obedience. The theme is so pervasive that the suspicion that it might represent something more than a personal opinion arises. Horace says that Parthia has been humbled and Phraates genuflects and accepts the law

[506] On the *Carmen,* the *novum saeculum*, the return of the 'golden age' and the 'victory' over the Parthians cf. Zanker 1988: 167-192, Galinsky 1996: 90-121, Wallace-Hadrill 1982, also Rose 2002.

and the power of Caesar and that Parthia fears and obeys him.[507] The theme of fear and obeisance that we find neatly expressed in the *Carmen Saeculare* returns in the verses of Virgil when, in the sixth book of the *Aeneid*, Anchises shows Aeneas the Parade of heroes and envisages the arrival of Augustus, the man destined to bring back the Golden Age to Latium and to extend the rule of Rome over the world.[508] About this he comments: 'At his arrival, even now both the kingdoms of the Caspian and the land of Azov, shudder at the god's responses'.[509] We may compare this with Trogus and Dio.

> *plusque Caesar magnitudine nominis sui fecit, quam armis facere alius imperator potuisset.*
>
> Justin / Trogus 42.5.12

> 'Caesar accomplished more by the greatness of his reputation than any other general could have done by force of arms. (Yardley 1994)

> *κἀν τούτῳ ὁ Φραάτης φοβηθεὶς μὴ καὶ ἐπιστρατεύσῃ οἱ, ὅτι μηδέπω τῶνσυγκειμένων ἐπεποιήκει τι, τά τε σημεῖα αὐτῷ καὶ τοὺς αἰχμαλώτους, … καὶ αὐτοὺς ἐκεῖνος ὡς καὶ πολέμῳ τινὶ τὸν Πάρθον νενικηκὼςἔλαβε: καὶ γὰρ ἐπὶ*

[507] Hor. *ep.* 1.12.27-28 (*Ius imperumque Phraates / Caesaris accepis genibus* minor) and *Ep.* 2.1.256, *Carmen Saeculare* 53-56, *Carm.* 4.5.25, 4.14, 4.15 respectively. On the expression *ius et imperium,* 'the law and the power', see also Tac. *Ann.* 3.71.2, Sall. *Iug.* 14.1, Livy 6.23.9 and 22.27.6 – on the genuflection, see note 486.

[508] 6.798-99.

[509] *huius in adventum iam ninc et Caspiam regna / responsis horrent diuum et Maeotia tellus* (tr. by Horsfall 2013: 54). A second passage (*Aen.* 7.606ff.) suggests that also Virgil may have agreed to the idea that the power of Augustus did not need bloodshed and war. Horsfall (2013: 545-46) and others connect the fear (*horrent*) for the Romans with the fear mentioned by Horace (e.g. *Carm. Saec.* 53-56 and *Carm.* 1.35.30-32) and the area on the Caspian Sea with the *rigidum Niphaten* in Hor. *Carm.* 2.9.20.

τούτοις ἐφρόνει μέγα, λέγων ὅτι τὰ πρότερόν ποτε ἐνταῖς μάχαις ἀπολόμενα ἀκονιτὶ ἐκεκόμιστο.

Dio 54.8.1-2

Meanwhile Phraates, **fearing** (*φοβηθεὶς*) that Augustus would lead an expedition against him because he had not yet performed any of his engagements, sent back to him the standards and all the captives, … Augustus received them as if he had conquered the Parthian in a war; for he took great pride in the achievement, declaring that he **had recovered without a struggle** what had formerly been lost in battle. (Cary, Loeb)

This is a new way to dress an old idea. There are many ways in which Rome can subjugate, and fear is one in which Rome imposes herself onto the 'other'.[510] After all, *amicitia* does not exclude subordination.[511]

The Parthian settlement of 20 BCE and the Persian Wars.

In this celebration of Roman superiority, were the Persian Wars now recycled to make a parallel with the (peaceful) recovery of the *signa* in order to present this event as a military success? Antony Spawforth does not have doubts.[512] In his opinion, this had

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[510] Sall. B*C* 9.5 or Livy 26.49.8 and Lavan 2013*:* 163-66.

[511] The definitive placement of the *signa* in the temple of Mars may suggest victory and subjugation, but also *amicitia*. In fact, the temple was also used, as a location for the allies to swear loyalty to Rome (Suet. *Aug.* 21.2) and a*micitia* often implied a relation of substantial submission (Lavan 2013: 156-58). On the functions of the temple of *Mars Ultor* and forum see Dio 55.10.2-5 and Suet. *Aug.* 29.1-2. On *amicitia* see Braund 1984*.* Josephus *AJ* 14.386-387.

[512] 1994, 2012.

already happened in 30-29 BCE. Rolf Schneider makes an explicit connection between the return of the standards, the Persian Wars and Alexander the Great.[513] Philip Hardie makes less of a case for Parthian and Persian parallel for the whole Augustan period and limits his considerations to Actium but suggests that, if the Battle of Actium had been perceived as a new Salamis, it would be understandable that the concept could, after ten years, have been extended naturally to the Parthians.[514]

They base their assertions on the following considerations. First, that the Parthians had been perceived as Persians and that this had been going on for a while, at least since 30 BCE. Second, they assume that the return of the *signa* had been presented as a military success. Third, on the idea that Actium was perceived as a re-enactment of the Battle of Salamis. Fourth, in retrospect, on the interpretation of the *naumachia* of 2 BCE as a reprise of the Battle of Salamis and a prolepsis of Gaius' Parthian war. Finally, they endorse Schneider's interpretation of three statues of kneeling barbarians carved in coloured marble found at Rome as a basis for a tripod commemorating Augustus' victory over the Parthians and, the interpretation of the fragments of life size statues of the Basilica Aemilia as an allusion to the Parthian settlement. Both artefacts would reproduce monuments dedicated by the Greeks after the victory over Persia in the fifth century.

Apropos the first, second and third point I have already tried to show that this may not be the case. With respect to Schneider's hypothesis, his reconstruction of the tripod is elegant and credible.[515] So is the interpretation of the statues of the Parthians/Asians from the Basilica Aemilia as related to the telamones/Persians that

[513] 2006: 60.
[514] Hardie 2007.
[515] Schneider 1986: 18-97, also Schneider 2002.

could be found in Athens.[516] If he is right, and it may well be so, this would be the first example of association Parthians – Persians / Parthian wars – Persian wars at Rome, and it would be coming *from Augustus himself*. His reading is not without problems, though. The main issue is that it is speculative, not universally accepted and, more importantly, if not supported by further evidence, it cannot be upheld. If, on stylistic considerations, it is possible to date the sculptures of the kneeling barbarians to the Augustan period, their dating to shortly after 20 BCE is based on the assumption that they belonged to a tripod resembling the one cited by Pausanias whose date we do not know (and for which we do not have any other description or any material remains) which (reasonably but not conclusively) Schneider supposed to be a monument celebrating the victory over the Persians, dedicated by Augustus at Athens around 19 BCE.[517] In other words, precise dating and the reconstruction relies only on the interpretation of the monument, which assumes the link between the Persian Wars and the Parthian Wars, and this leads to circular reasoning.[518] All this assumes that the statues mentioned by Pausanias were carved under Augustus. Should they be dated to the period of Hadrian, as it has been suggested, the train of thought would become more problematic.[519] As for the sculptures of the Basilica Aemilia, they could be another variation on the theme of the relatively common motif of the youth/servant dressed in Parthian/Oriental attire. Thus, as in the case of the Temple of Apollo Sosianus we are looking at a complex (and sometimes

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[516] Vitruvius 1.1.6. On the Basilica Aemilia, see Schneider 2007: 70-75 and 1986: 109-125; also Kuttner 1995b: 83, who suggests that the figures of Parthian captives in the Basilica Aemilia allude to the Persian Porch in Sparta, and mentions the Persian caryatids at the Augustan Villa Farnesina in Rome, which may have belonged to Julia and Agrippa.

[517] 'There are also statues in Phrygian marble of Persians supporting a bronze tripod; both the figures and the tripod are worth seeing' Paus. 1.18.8 (Jones, Loeb) – were they kneeling? (Same perplexity in Dodero 2010)

[518] Some reasons for doubting Schneider's reconstruction in Rose 2005: 24n22 and Dodero 2010). For an alternative hypothesis without connections with the Persians, cf. Talamo 2002.

[519] Spawforth 1994: 239 (has subsequently modified his opinion, cf. 2012: 106), Edwards 2003: 66.

contradictory) web of references and meanings.[520] Even though, this time, the assimilation Persian – Parthians appears to be much more credible, it is still possible that the oriental character of the telamones was simply supposed to bring forth the idea of subjugated Asians and that the model was another Hellenistic monument rather than the Spartan Porch.[521]

The Naumachia. The discordant note.

In the picture of tranquillity and prosperity based on peaceful external collaboration and internal celebration of superiority over Parthia there is only one discordant note which has, obviously, attracted much attention. In 2 BCE the Temple of Mars *Ultor* was dedicated. In the event, a series of martial festivals were staged which included the *ludi martialis,* the positioning of the Parthian *spolia* in the temple of Mars and a *naumachia* representing the battle of Salamis.[522] Surely, the imagery was strong: a great display of imperialistic power with the Parthians placed in a preeminent position.[523] Shortly after, in 1 BCE, Gaius, the grandson and adopted son of Augustus, who had played a relevant role in the celebrations, was provided with a retinue of advisors, invested with proconsular *imperium* and sent East, on a mission that seems to have been orchestrated to give him the opportunity to gain some honours and credit as leader.

Those who believe the two events to be linked and perceive a return of the theme of the conquest of Parthia note the important part that Gaius had had in the festival of 2

[520] Contradictions are acknowledged by Schneider (1986: 123-24).
[521] Schneider 1986: 115.
[522] Dio 55.10.6-8, Vell. 2.00.2, Aug. *RG* 22, see Rich 2009, Galinsky 1996: 197-213, Richardson 2012: 155-158, Spawforth 1994: 233, Zanker 1988: 84. On *naumachias* at Rome, see Coleman 1993.
[523] There were also Trojan games (*ludi troiani*) in which 'the Trojan East and the Roman West were brought together' (Schneider 2012: 105).

BCE, the allusions to eastern victories – in particular the connections with the Greek-Persian Wars – and the presence of Alexandrian themes. They recall the testimony of Ovid, who seems to compare the events in the *Forum Augustii* to a triumph over Parthia, and conclude that Gaius was setting out to the limits of the empire from a place charged with references to Roman glory, power and superiority, as the avenger of Crassus and that Augustus was willing to send the message that the campaign in the East included a Parthian War.[524]

Let us start with Ovid. None of the ancient historians (neither Velleius, nor Suetonius, nor, to my knowledge, any other source) connects the celebrations in the Forum of Augustus with the mission of Gaius. In fact, the reading of the episode as a farewell composition rests almost exclusively on Ovid's testimony who, in his description of the show in *Ars Amatoria*, inserts a section structured as a *propemptikon* wishing a prosperous journey, for Gaius, the adoptive son of Augustus.[525]

The passage begins with Ovid listing, for the benefit of his reader, various situations favourable for picking up girls. He mentions the Circus, the gladiatorial games and a most recent event, which has proved to be extremely propitious: the *naumachia*.[526] This leads the poet to elaborate further on Gaius, who, he says, is about to complete the conquest of the world.[527] After supplying a moral justification for the expedition (family values), the poet wishes the young prince to return from Parthia as victor and to

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[524] Inevitable conflict: Sherwin-White, 1987: 326 contra Campbell 2002. Gaius as avenger: Lerouge 2007: 116-17, Herbert-Brown 1994: 106. For the episode as a show put on by Augustus: Herbert-Brown 1994: 106, Gruen 1996: 160-61, Gruen 1985: 66, Syme 1984: 921-23.
[525] 1.171-228. Dimundo 2003 for a reading of the text. On the dating Syme 1978: 8-11. A famous example of *propemtikon*: Prop. 3.4.3.
[526] 1.135-177.
[527] 1.177-178. *nunc ultime Oriens, noster eris.*

celebrate a triumph. Then he goes back, rather abruptly, to his theme: the triumph of Gaius will be the perfect place for seducing girls.

How seriously are we supposed to take the entire passage? Ovid sees the public events essentially as an occasion for love encounters. But the intersection between love and the triumph is taken to a whole new level in which the roles of the participants are constantly switched and confused. Lines 165-170 describe how Cupid hits the spectator of the gladiatorial combat with his arrow.

> *Illa saepe puer Veneris pugnavit harena,*
> *Et qui spectavit vulnera, vulnus habet.*
> *Dum loquitur tangitque manum poscitque libellum*
> *Et quaerit posito pignore, vincat uter,*
> *Saucius ingemuit telumque volatile sensit,*
> *Et pars spectati muneris ipse fuit.*
>
> *Ars Amatoria* 1.165-170

> Often has Venus' Boy fought upon that sand, and he who watched the wounds has himself been wounded. While he is speaking and touching her hand and asking for the book, and inquiring which is winning as he lays his stake, he feels the winged barb and groans with the wound, and is himself part of the show which he is watching. (Mozley, Loeb)

The fight in the arena becomes the fight between Love and the spectator. The spectator is now a lover! The military aspect of the *naumachia* that follows is also confused by the

influence of Cupid.[528] On that occasion, Ovid remarks, everybody had found a love which, for many, included distress (*torsit*) and again the spectator of the military event becomes the protagonist of the show.[529] Love also confuses identity; in fact, the love that so many found that day is for a stranger (*advena*).[530]

The same alternating pattern characterises the *propemptikon*. The tone fluctuates between the serious and the flippant. The roles are constantly changing. In lines 191-200 the light-hearted mood gives way to gravity when Ovid switches from *praeceptor Amoris* to military advisor and gives advice to Gaius on how to address the army and on how to behave. The following apostrophe to Mars and the description of the future triumph of Gaius are also characterized by a very high and solemn tone.[531] But then, after describing a scene of the enemy in chains, the tone changes abruptly again.[532] Happy girls and boys ready to make love return to the centre stage, the lover-spectator even makes things up, including the ethnicity of the captured peoples (that is, the Persians) and the triumph turns out to be another occasion for seducing girls.[533]

Nothing is as it seems to be: the lover, the foreigner and the triumph are linked and the roles are inextricably intermingled. The blurring of roles between spectators and actors of the parade, love and objects of love questions the nature of the triumph. The

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[528] Although *naumachias* were staged in the context of particularly lavish celebrations as spectacle accessory to the gladiatorial contest, they were more akin to a stage infantry battle than to a *gladiatorium munus.* See Dunkle 2008: 192-201 (he defines them as 'paragladiatorial'), Wiedemann 1992: 90, Coleman 1993: 67.

[529] *Eheu, quam multos advena torsit amor!* (1.176 'alas! how many did a foreign love o'erthrow!'). Note how the pain of the lover matches the lament of the spectator of the gladiatorial combat wounded by Cupid's arrow (1.169-170). See Prop. 3.6.39. On observers becoming participants, see also Livy 1.28.2, 1.9.8 and Virgil *Aen*. 5.75-602; all these are instances of incorporation of the foreigner into the Roman sphere through assimilation between the watcher and the watched (Feldherr 1995); I wonder whether Ovid is playing here with this topos.

[530] Ovid is very fond of the plays that can be done with the attributes of Cupid and the Parthians, see also *Rem. Am.* 157-158.

[531] 1.201-218.

[532] 1.217 *Spectabunt laeti iuvenes mixtaeque puellae.*

[533] 1.222-228.

Propertian echoes remind the reader of his rejection of war and emphasise that the triumph is an occasion for feast and love.[534] How can anyone be sure that what is being watched is Gaius' triumph over the Parthians? Can we be sure that when he announces the military campaign (177-216) we can trust Ovid only because he is using a sober tone? When the spectator-lover invents the content of the triumph, is he alluding to the fact that there had not been any triumphs over the Parthians (in 20) and that Gaius' expedition is just another show and not a single spear will be thrown against the enemy? Is the poet mocking even Caesar Augustus? There is enough margin to question the reliability of this tongue-in-cheek passage for a historical reconstruction of the intentions of the ceremony and at least to admit the possibility that the connection between the show (where Gaius was one of the protagonists) and the campaign is an invention of Ovid; or a misinterpretation.[535]

The second reason for scepticism derives from the role of the Parthians in the context of the Forum of Augustus. There are three elements that connect to the East and Parthia in the celebrations of 2 BCE. First, the temple and deposition of the *signa*, and this strongly recalls the theme of revenge and the glory obtained by Augustus. Then, there are the association Alexander – Augustus and the *naumachia*.

Concerning Alexander, Pliny mentions several memorabilia in the new forum. First, two paintings of the Macedonian by Apelles whose precise collocation we ignore.

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[534] Compare with *Amores* 1.3 where the triumphal procession is led by Cupid. Propertian echoes (especially the juxtaposition of the themes of triumph and love): compare Prop. 4.14-15 with *Ars. Am.* 1.217, *Ars. Am.* 1.215 with Prop. 2.1.33 and Prop. 3.4. This is not coincidental (Dimundo 2003: 95-96). It should be noted that some commentators have interpreted Prop. 3.4 as ironic (Wilkinson 1960: 1110-13, Lefèvre 1966: 150, contra Fedeli 1985: 158).

[535] Misinterpretation: Sherwin-White 1984: 324n3 (or maybe he was exaggerating to make a better impression on the girl?). On a reading of the passage as a '(sham) triumphal representation signalling sham victories' see Beard 2003: 35-37.

but we are told that they were in very frequented parts of the complex.[536] Then, there was a colossal statue representing Alexander and two more sculptures from his tent.[537] What is this association supposed to mean? There has been much scholarly debate on the importance and meaning of an *imitatio Alexandrii* by Octavian / Augustus; however, there is a general consensus that some degree of assimilation occurred in the period between 30 and 23 BCE.[538] Actions such as the visit to the royal tomb at Alexandria and the adoption of the signet ring with the effigy of Alexander were intentional, explicit and came undoubtably from Octavian.[539] This ostentatious homage, however, lasted only for a short period of time with the most significant initiatives occurring while the *princeps* was in Alexandria and Athens. The reason for that has been noted. It was a move tailored for the Greek-Eastern public with a manifold message. Augustus, by reaching the extreme ends of the world had overtaken Alexander, by making this statement at Athens and Alexandria he marked his appropriation of the Hellenistic and Athenian past.[540] At Rome, where the myth of Alexander had more ambiguous overtones, the act was dropped.[541] Only the signet ring image of Alexander lasted for a few more years, until 23 BCE, when

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[536] Pliny *NH* 35.94 (*celeberrimis partibus dicaverat*). See also Pollini 2012: 186 who places them with the colossus and Marrone 1980 who suggests the Temple of Mars Ultor; cf. Servius, *ad Aen.* 1.294

[537] Pliny *NH* 34.48, Galinsky 1996: 197-208.

[538] Even Erich Gruen, one of the most convinced detractors of the idea of *imitatio Alexandrii* in Republican period agrees on this, Gruen 1995: 190.

[539] Visit to the tomb of Alexander: Suet. *Aug.* 18.1, Dio 51.16.3-5, Plut. *Ant.* 80.1, signet ring: Dio 51.3.5-6, Plin. *NH* 37. 10. Other parallels include legends and omens relating to the birth of the emperor (Suet. *Aug.* 94.4-5), tax exemption to Ilium (Strabo. 13.1.27), the foundation of cities (see *supra*), the emphasis given to diplomatic contacts with India (Orosius *Hist.* 6.21.19–20 , Florus 2.34, *RG* 31.1, Strabo 15.1.40, Dio 54.9.10, with O'Sullivan 2016: 340-45) and some coins representing a triumph with elephants (*RIC*^{2} 280–284, 301, 311. *RIC*^{2} 140, cf. Rich 1998: 78, 118–20).

[540] O'Sullivan 2016 focussing mainly on Athens. Cf. also Gruen 1995 and Sidari 1982: 33-37. On the hypothesis that the negative overtones are a creation of Augustan propaganda as a way to besmirch Antony's memory, see Sidari 1982: 37-40. Gruen 1990: 71 acknowledges the existence of an *aemulatio Alexandrii* which was used by Augustus to affirm his superiority but, strangely, sees it as 'message to the Parthians'.

[541] On the ambivalence of the figure of Alexander, see Spencer 2002: 121-38

it was replaced by his own portrait.[542] Why, then, reviving Alexandrian motives in the Forum after two decades? Erich Gruen and Otto Weippert attributes it to Augustus' fondness for the painter Apelles.[543] It could be argued that it might have been part of a reaction to Antony's imitation of Alexander and therefore loosely connected to the victory over Cleopatra. But there are no direct references to Actium or the civil war in the forum, it is a fully Roman-vs-foreign-enemies program of glorification.[544] In fact, the only allusion to Egypt, the heads of Jupiter Ammon on the shields decorating the upper portico, eschews the Actian theme and hark back to Alexander, who had visited the god's temple in the oasis of Siwah and had hung the shields captured at the Granicus battle on the Parthenon.[545] The lack of references to Actium makes sense. The temple of Mars, which the forum frames, creating a coherent architectonical unity, is a temple to revenge, voted ca. forty years earlier following the assassination of Julius Caesar;[546] there was no revenge in the feud of Augustus vs Antony and Cleopatra. The Athenian model has replaced Pergamum.[547] It is in this context of the recovery of the imperial period of Athens that we can understand the presence of Alexander and the *naumachia* as well. Rome has acquired the legacy of Athens and taken it to new levels of grandiosity. The entire history of Rome (the ancestors of Augustus and the great men of Rome lining the forum) leads to Augustus, who, while acknowledging Alexander's greatness, has surpassed the Macedonian, because he has subjugated the whole world and because he

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[542] On the seals and their sequence (shortly after 30 BCE the sphinx changes to Alexander, 23 BCE from Alexander is replaced by a self-portrait), see Instinsky 1962: 27 and 36.
[543] Weippert 1972: 256, Gruen 1995: 191n93.
[544] Cf. also the functions of the Forum as stated by Suetonius and Dio (note 505)
[545] Arrian *Anabasis* 1.16.7 and 3.3.1-4.5. Another Egyptian element is in the slaughter of thirty-six crocodiles in the Circus Flaminius (Dio 55.10.8).
[546] See Herbert-Brown 1994: 98-100 and Spannagel 1999:79-85 for different hypotheses.
[547] Summary of Athenian 'quotations' and discussion in Kleiner 1992: 100, Galinsky 1996: 203-04.

embodies the entire line of Roman heroes.[548] As in Livy's famous imaginary encounter between the military might of Rome and Alexander, it is the power of the history of Rome that allows Rome to assume her position of dominance.[549] But in Augustus' version, Republican history culminates with himself; one-man rule (however disguised) and the rule of Rome become one thing.[550] The meaning of the associations Greece – Rome and Alexander – Augustus, indicates that Rome and the *princeps* are better than their predecessor rather than attempting to emulate his successes. Therefore, the one-off event of the *naumachia* may be a re-enactment of the battle of Salamis and a celebration of the battle of Actium, but not because the two events had already been associated with each other. In both cases, the accent is on Roman appropriation of the Greek national glory (just as Florus says) and of the civilizing heritage of Athens, not on the anticipation of the defeat of the Parthian-Persians. It is true that the elements recalling Salamis, Greece and Alexander re-create the paradigm of the clash East – West, but they also recall the successes of the Greeks and place them next to the revenge over Parthia and world dominance, that is, the attainments of Augustus and Rome that are celebrated in the complex.[551] This sophisticated articulation of meanings (to which the presence of Alexander and the naval battle must be connected) seems to be too pervasive and too coherent with the layout of the new forum to be a last-minute appendage in connection to Gaius' eastern mission and with a pretentious parallel with the Persian Wars.[552]

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[548] See Marrone 1980.
[549] Livy 9.17-19. On the 'great men' in the forum cf. Galinsky 1996: 199. On Alexander as a foil for Roman superiority: Gruen 1990: 69-72 and 1998: 191.
[550] On Livy's passage as censuring the one-man regime see Morello 2002: 89-85; more discussion in Weippert 1972: 224-38. On the Roman attitude towards Alexander as of respect and superiority, see Gruen 1995 and Garcia Moreno 1990.
[551] Luce 2009 insists on the personal character of the Forum.
[552] On the planning of the complex Rowell 1941 and Herbert-Brown 1994: 98-100. On a side note, it may of some significance that none of the monuments celebrating Gaius erected after 2 BCE allude to the Persian Wars; see Rose 2005: 54-62.

Finally, another element of perplexity derives from the sequence of the events. Dio writes that, after the dedication, Gaius was sent to the Danube border to gain experience in a relatively peaceful area. Only in a second moment, after a stay of unspecified length, because troubles in Armenia had arisen, Augustus reluctantly decided to send him to Syria. Having set off with a newly given *imperium* Gaius reached Syria in 2 CE where he met the Parthian king in the middle of the Euphrates and a treaty was signed.[553] Unfortunately, there is a gap in the account and some details are missing. We know, however, that after leaving the Balkans, instead of heading immediately to the troubled area, Gaius stopped several times on the way, on Greek islands, where he met Tiberius, at Athens and even took a tour of Egypt and Arabia.[554] If Dio's reconstruction of the events is correct, even if he had been sent to the Danube for military 'training', how could Augustus have foreseen the problems in Armenia and have organized the celebrations in the Forum accordingly? Even conceding that troubles in Armenia and Parthia had already started and that the celebrations of 2 BCE had something to do with Gaius' mission in the East, would Gaius have been ready for a major campaign in Parthia with only a few months of experience?[555] How can his wandering be explained? Moreover, would such display of superiority not seem somewhat ironical when somebody is leaving to fight against the enemy which is represented as defeated at the centre of the celebration? How can the control of Rome (the new and better Athens) over the world, under the leadership of Augustus (the new and better Alexander) be celebrated at the same time when the necessity to go out and fight an insubordinate

[553] Dio 55.10.17-18 and 55.10A.
[554] When Gaius moved East he went to Samos then to Egypt (Pliny *NH* 2.168; 4.141, 160; 12.55-6; 32.10.).
[555] Cf. Syme 1978: 8-13. Armenia had been in a state of unrest since 6 BCE (Tac. *Ann.* 2.3.2-4.1) but the escalation coincides with the exchange of letters that Dio places after the departure of Gaius (Dio 55.10-20-21).

neighbour is asserted? Even if this would be straightforward, it does not make much sense. Why undermine the credibility of the entire representation by admitting that its existence was based on a lie (which is the message that would come out from the celebration if, as Ovid puts it, it was meant to present Gaius as the *real* avenger of Crassus (Ovid *Ars A*m. 177-181))? All these are good reasons to believe that the celebrations were not to be intended as a prelude to a Parthian war.[556]

In fact, there was no need for military victories, real or feigned. There was already an example of victory without bloodshed: Augustus. Thus, what Augustus may have been doing was to give the Romans a powerful reminder of his great achievement and how he had obtained it. In other words, the whole show looked backwards. Gaius was about to be sent to the East with *imperium* (as Tiberius, Agrippa, and even Augustus himself before him) but without implying that he would fight and take revenge. Gaius would be the new Augustus who would not even need to fight or cross into hostile territory; his presence would be enough to make the enemy cave in and humbly accept terms. Because the Romans are superiors. As had happened in 19 BCE, the power of the name of Rome and her leader (new and old), would be more than sufficient to obtain the desired outcome (regardless of the identity of the counterpart). The celebration constituted a blueprint for Gaius.[557] The show would provide him with an aura of *auctoritas* based on the attainments of his adoptive father and would fit with the idea of the Parthians as it is conveyed by the structure and illustration of the fora (and by the *Res Gestae* 29). Perhaps deliberately, the message was not neatly spelled out but mixed with other symbols or

[556] More good reasons to rule out the possibility that there would be bloodshed and a fully-fledged war in Syme (1978: 8-13).

[557] The passage through Egypt may have had the purpose of creating a parallel with Augustus and Alexander (Sidari 1982: 25). There is even a close resemblance (admittedly not something Augustus could have entirely controlled) with the events of 23-20 BCE.

perhaps Augustus had imagined a 'grand finale', that would have been the crowning achievement, which did not happen because of Gaius' death. Indirect evidence corroborating this reading can be found, perhaps not too unpredictably, in another passage in which Ovid looks at the forum from a perspective other than that of the love-hunter. His description of the area and the temple in the fifth book of the *Fasti* ties together the recovery of the standards presented as a success (although technically it was a restoration of balance) with the role of Augustus - *Pater patriae* as the one who bestows peace achieved through military might, regardless of the fact that the land of the Parthians remains unconquered.[558] Gaius is not mentioned, but this changes little.

To sum up, Augustus, Rome, their victories, and Parthia are at the centre of the Forum of Augustus. The message this complex conveyed can be considered as a carefully planned representation of power. The 'culmination' of the series of successes that Rome had obtained, of Augustus' achievements, of Rome as the new (better) Athens, of the *princeps* as the new (better) Alexander, and of the *princeps* and Rome as the culminating point of a long tradition of conquest and dedication to the state. The attitude towards the Parthians is consistent and unbroken from 20 BCE to 14 CE, the whole pageant of 2 BCE looked back, not ahead to future campaigns.[559] Augustus' plan works perfectly even without a real threat from Parthia and there is no need to introduce a change of 'foreign policy'.

Thus, unless we deny any assimilation of the Persian Wars in Roman culture – a hardly tenable position – if the battle of Actium is not at the root of a revival of the Persian

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[558] *Fasti* 589-594.

[559] Note the *denarius* (Mattingly n. 348-349) with Gaius on a horse, with shield and sword. The standards behind him are the standards placed in the temple of Mars (Bowersock 1984: 173). The emphasis is on the past, not on future events.

Wars and the Parthian threat is less central an argument that it has been supposed, how do we explain the tripod mentioned by Schneider, the *naumachia* and the reliefs mentioned by Hölscher? And why did the motive arrive at Rome just when Rome began to systematically use fifth–century Athens as model? [560] Did the Romans import the Athenian model and with it come the representation of the Persian Wars just because it was an existing connection?[561] I do not think so. I am convinced that the memory of the Persian Wars was a powerful myth but also a potentially explosive, local deviation originating in a specific place (Athens) and finding fertile ground in a 'localistic' conception of history. Before rounding off the argument, therefore, it is necessary to briefly survey the character of historiography in the years of the Augustan *principate*. A good starting point is a strange anomaly: the coexistence, along with the supposed subjugation, of the notion of equality between Rome and Parthia.

3. <u>Parthian equality, universal history and the 'normalization' of the opposition in the East.</u>

Parthian equality

As mentioned, there is some consistency in the official position and among the intellectuals under Augustus before 20 BCE in the relation to Parthia. The themes are security, revenge, a renewed sense of self-confidence and expectations but also

[560] Shayegan (2011: 337) places the first intentional reuse of the Persian Wars in 2 BCE in occasion of the *naumachia*.

[561] Did Augustus prefer the Athenian model? It is impossible to ascertain. I am inclined to believe that he took everything that was useful to his purposes. It just so happened that 'the artistic forms of the Greek High Classical period were specifically appropriate for this [=to represent the content of Augustus' message] because they represented the high ethos of *arête/virtus*.' (Hölscher 2006: 252)

uncertainty. Then, in 20 BCE, with the *signa* returned and the Parthians under Roman control, Rome could claim to be the hegemonic power of the known world. And yet somebody thought that there was an empire that was as powerful as hers, none other than Parthia.

Strabo, an author not characterized by anti-Roman leanings, in two instances explicitly asserts that Parthia and Rome are equal and on various occasions implicitly reiterates the point.[562] For example, he maintains that both Romans and Parthians reached their position starting from very humble conditions and relied for their expansion on strength and violence.[563] He also notes their barbarism. He does so by linking Parthian might to their proximity to the Scythians and emphasising Rome's barbarian beginnings.[564]

Pompeus Trogus is another writer who stresses the independence of Parthia. At the beginning of the forty-first book he affirms that the world is equally divided.

> *Parthi, penes quos, velut divisione orbis cum Romanis facta, nunc Orientis imperium est*.
>
> 41.1.1
>
> Today the Parthians rule the East, the world being partitioned, as it were, between them and the Romans (Yardley 1994)

[562] Strabo 11.9.1-3 (C514-515), 17.3.24 (C 839). On Strabo and Parthia see: Momigliano 1975: 139-141, Gabba 1982 and 1984, Dąbrowa 2015.
[563] Romans: 5.3.2-4, Parthians: 11.9.2.
[564] 9.2.2 C401.

Although some considerations on the might of Augustus may indicate an imbalance in favour of Rome, the idea of parity holds and the work ends with two masters concluding the sequence of empires that had begun in the East.[565]

Where does the idea of equality come from? Some scholars explain it by saying that Strabo and Trogus copied anti-Roman historians, others by suggesting that it is a later interpolation.[566] For Holger Sonnabend there is a political explanation that implies a top-down intervention in that Augustus may have wanted to find a justification for the non-conquest of Parthia.[567] Finally, a non-political reading has also been suggested. Charlotte Lerouge suggests that Strabo and Trogus would be interested in emphasising the success of the Parthians who had begun as an unknown, humble and nomadic people and had become a great power, as great as the Romans.[568] There might be a further reason, though, one that would also help explaining the revival of the Persian Wars. On the one hand, Roman and Parthian equality would reflect the position of some intellectuals who, by looking at the development of Rome from a different perspective, Hellenistic, peripheral, and philo-imperial (=pro-autocracy), attempted to explain an anomalous situation in which Roman supremacy coexisted with Parthian anomalous subjugation.[569] On the other, it would proceed from a very specific conception of

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[565] Trogus, however, is not interested in defining who will eventually prevail or if there will be equilibrium. This is an open problem, which is left to the reader. On Trogus and Parthia: van Wickevoort Crommelin 1998: 259-75, Muccioli 2007 (esp. 112-13) and 2016: 117-47. The work of Pompeius Trogus poses considerable difficulties. About the author, the epitomizer Justin and the fidelity of the *Epitome*: Syme, 1988: 367, Nuñez, 1987. On the *Epitome:* Ballesteros-Pastor, 2013: 52-55, Yarrow, 2006: 111-16.
[566] Liebmann-Frankfort 1969: 911 on Timagenes as Trogus' anti-Roman source. On Strabo and Timagenes see: Bowersock 1965: 126. Interpolation: Brunt 1990: 464.
[567] Sonnabend 1986: 209-10. They are different (*aliter orbis*), so different that they would contaminate the Romans, better not to have anything to do with them
[568] Lerouge 2007: 122. She thinks the division in two also gives a sense of stability which would have appealed to Augustus and could well be a theme promoted (or at least accepted favourably) by the emperor rather than used against him (especially after Teutoburg). After all is this not the theme of the *Forum Augustii*? cf. Suet. *Aug.* 9.1.
[569] Crawford 1978.

universal history that is the combination of Polybian themes, Greek culture, acceptance of Roman military hegemony and a notion of Rome's within an expanded, almost world-encompassing, empire which developed during Augustus' *principate* and with the approval of the emperor.[570]

Universal conception of history

As already noted, the East had reacted to Roman hegemony creating revolts and an anti-Roman ideology. At the time of Aristonicus, in the late second century BC, the opposition to Rome in the Greek world had rallied around demagogues, the lower classes and even the slaves. As discussed earlier, Mithridates probably had a more comprehensive policy and tried to bring to his side the elite and the poor. It did not work out. Nevertheless, whatever the reason for that, it is evident that Mithridates' social propaganda was not mere demagogy. We have also seen that, in addition to the social there were also other components in Eupator's appeal. In his cultural propaganda (including coins, religious activities, oracles and *euergetism*), he postulated that Greeks and Asians had equal weight. Asia united with Greece by the hatred for Rome and by common roots converging in the person of the king of Pontus, would conquer Rome and the entire world, just as the western power had trampled the Greek autonomy and substituted the Asian empires. This idea – it has long been recognised – derives from a universal concept of history.[571] For Polybius, the man who first used the concept of universal history to explain the supremacy of Rome, the empires that matter are Greece, Macedonia, Carthage and

[570] For a definition of universal history Cornell 2010: 111. On universal history, only to mention a few: Momigliano 1984, Liddel and Fear 2010, Alonso-Nùñez 2002, Asheri 2003, Austin 1993= Austin 2003, Clarke 1999b, Muccioli 2005 with extensive bibliography.
[571] E.g. Momigliano 1984: 89-90.

Rome. Persia is a ‘distant shadow’.[572] The universal message of Mithridates is difficult to pin down but the focal point is clearly the king himself. He is the centre of the historical process that extends in time and space. With history and geography converging on the figure of the Greek-Persian king Mithridates, the Achaemenid Empire is brought back into the picture. As any Hellenistic kings, Mithridates had his court of intellectuals composed mainly by historians.[573] It is a pity that nothing of the output of these authors has survived apart from their names. We will never know if and how they articulated a universal idea of history and how they treated the Achaemenid precedent. But it is hardly believable that they had strayed from the official line, which so very clearly embraced universalism and mixed Persian and Macedonian / Greek ancestry.

Anti-Roman feelings, intellectual opposition and social tensions did not disappear with the death of Mithridates and, along with uncertainty, they shaped the relationship between the East and Rome between 35 and 30 BCE.[574] During the triumviral period, as the man with authority over the area, many philo-Romans in the East would naturally have sided with Antony. Antony also managed to bring some anti-Romans to his side by presenting himself as a Hellenistic king rather than a Roman general, and by reorganizing the eastern part of the empire in such a way that, without Rome surrendering to her hegemony, the margins of autonomy of the Greek-Hellenistic ruling elite were

[572] Pol. 1.2. Momigliano 1984: 88. On the sequence of empires and variations see Wiesehöfer 2003. Polybius may have been anticipated by Aemilius Sura (Alonso-Nùñez 1989, Cotta Ramosino 2005). He mentions the sequence of empires, but little can be said about his universal concept of history. Polybius has certainly a universal perspective, whether he also endorsed the idea of *translatio imperii* is matter of contention (pro: Alonso-Nùñez, 1983, Martin 1993. Contra Zecchini 1995: 225-32 and Mendels 1981).

[573] Historians: Metrodorus of Scepsi (Strabo 609), Aesopus *FGrH* 2.B 187a, Heraclides of Magnesia *FGrH* 2.B 187, Teucrus *FGrH* 3.A 274 (see Bowersock 1984: 108n7). Poets: Just. 6.4

[574] The importance of anti-Roman feelings should not be underestimated if Livy took the trouble to dedicate a long digression to it (9.17-19).

increased.[575] However, whatever progress Antony had made, the civil wars broke any aspirations to unity. As Sulla, Pompey and Lucullus before him, Antony had created a network of loyalties to himself as the representative of Rome: the kings were under Rome *and* under the personal patronage of Antony. The propaganda against Cleopatra and Egypt on the one hand, the personal nature of the bonds of loyalty of the allies on the other, deepened the chasm between East and West. [576] In an empire divided between Antony and Octavian, a universalist ideology of mutual integration could not exist. It is not surprising that the latent opposition tended to resurface (for example, prophecies along the lines of those in the *Sybilline Oracles* seem to have continued circulating). For this reason, after Actium, the East needed constant watch and measures had to be taken to ascertain that the divide between the eastern and western parts of the empire be bridged.[577] Augustus was well aware of this problem and acted accordingly.

On the ideological level he was faced with a conundrum. He needed a pacificatory ideology that made sense of and supported Roman hegemony but also considered the difficulties of the Greek elite and the intellectuals of the East challenged by the new situation.[578] Internal peace could not be obtained unless local particularism was abandoned or integrated into a universalistic conception of the empire. But universalism, like localism, had led to opposition. What could be called the 'Polybian solution' (acceptance of Rome's hegemony) had proved not to be a viable option (hegemony had

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[575] On the details of the reorganization of the East see Bowersock 1965: 42-61, on Antony's eastern network of loyalty Levi 1986: 201-09.
[576] Another obstacle to unity was the economic damage caused by the division of the empire (Syme 1939: 290). Oracles: Bowersock 1965: 110.
[577] Bowersock 1984: 169-70.
[578] Cf. Crawford 1978.

not been accepted). Thus, in a very typical way, Augustus promoted a form of appropriation, amalgamation and re-shaping of all these strands.[579]

Universality and germane concepts (such as the idea of universal history) are a methodologically tricky field. Liv Yarrow has attempted to define a conceptual model that would take into consideration the alternative manifestations of universality in Late-Republican / Early-Imperial Rome. She identifies two types of universality according to the relationship the various points of the system have with the centre. She defines the centre as 'focal point' and the relationship between it and the rest as 'focalization' of which she distinguishes two. One, which she calls 'gentle focalization', occurs when 'all points of a perceived periphery of history are interconnected through a central point' and a second, 'radical focalization', which is a 'type of synecdoche …[whereby] the centre comes to represent or encompass the whole'. In our case the centre / focal point is obviously Rome (the 'points' could be the cities of the Roman Empire, kings 'friends' of Rome, etc.).[580]

The official representation of Augustan empire as universal can be found in the *Res Gestae*.[581] Augustus brought peace to the world and civilization to the barbarians, he restored order, freedom, security on the sea and on land, and he expanded the empire to encompass the entire world. In short, under Augustus the Roman empire assumed a fully ecumenical character. Regardless of its correspondence to the reality, surely it was the result of a very well calculated definition. Variations on the theme can be found in the claims to Roman global supremacy of Virgil and Horace, or in Livy's historical

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[579] A comparison between Polybius' and Dionisius' universal approaches in Martin 1993.
[580] Yarrow 2010, quotations from pages 134 and 132 respectively.
[581] 1.1, 3.1.

project.[582] The universality of the Roman Empire for these authors has a peculiar character. It conceives the world as a city, the world is Rome and so the history of Rome is the history of the world, a point most concisely and elegantly expressed by Ovid: 'the space / expanse of the city of Rome and of the world is the same'.[583] Particularly significant in this respect is Livy who, by placing his *Ab Urbe Condita* firmly within the annalistic framework, not only follows a traditional approach to historiography but also sets Rome at the focal point of his historical programme.[584] Since annals are originally a record of the magistrates and their acts, annalistic historiography is a form of *horography* (local history). It is also the arena in which the deeds (military or political) of the elite are put on display, and elite in Rome is tantamount to senate. The senate is obviously Republican and (for cultural and historical reasons) tends to conceptualise the other as a subject. In other words, Livy's history of Rome is profoundly Roman in its conception of history and of the other but is original in that the expansion of the city transforms the local into the universal. [585] Local history of Rome grows to encompass the entire world. This form of universalism is peculiar to Roman intellectuals and responds well to the needs of the Roman elite. It is also the counterpart to the anti-Roman reaction of Asia.

The other form of universal ideology, a 'gentle' version, a sort of middle way, was elaborated by a group of provincial intellectuals. They are the Greeks Diodorus, Dionysius, Strabo, Timagenes and the Gaulish Trogus. They all conceived of Rome as the focal point within a wider historical and geographical context and embraced universalism

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[582] Virg. *Georg.* 3.16-33 and the obvious *Aen.* 1.278-9, Hor. *Carm.* 1.12.57, Livy *praef.* 1.

[583] At *Fasti* 2.684 (*Romanae spatium est Urbis et orbis idem*; Frazer, Loeb). Diodorus Siculus is also a good example (1.3.5-6) or Aelius Aristides (*Roman Oration* 9-10). See also Livy 38.51.4.

[584] Cato may have been the exception; see Cornell 2010.

[585] On annalistic tradition at Rome and ethnocentricity of Roman history, see Fornara 1983: 23-28 and 38-42.

as a way to vindicate the central role of Greek culture in the expansion of the Roman empire.[586] They were pro autocracy (they accepted that Rome needed an emperor), inclusive (favoured assimilation and integration of the other, at least the high classes) and were actively participating in the administration of the Empire. Their idea of the historical role of the empire differed from that of Augustus and his entourage, but it resonated with their interests because it was well suited to promote post-Actium unity and normalization. It was a universal conception of Empire that could match the eastern, anti-Roman universalism. In this confrontation, the latter became equated to opposition, demagogy and a mass-oriented policy, disorder and the memory of Mithridates. The 'Asian' universal ideology became ethnically characterised (Asia as a superpower against Rome) and was ousted and substituted with Athenian classicism, support for Rome, order, control of the local elites.[587] It is not a coincidence that Asian rhetoric was rejected in favour of 'pure' Attic oratory (Isocrates, Lysias), or that Dionysius disputes heatedly with Mithridatic historiography.[588]

It is within this framework that the place of Parthia, the revival of the Persian Wars and the anomaly of Parthian equality with Rome must be set.

Parthian equality in Strabo and Trogus as universal historians

In Strabo, the perspective equal might and cultural inferiority make sense only if we see it within the context of Strabo's notion of Rome empire which in turn makes sense only

[586] Philo *Legatio ad Gaium* 143-149. On the issue Gabba 1982.
[587] On the Greek intellectual under Augustus see Gabba 1982 (esp. 50-52), Bowersock 1965: 122-39.
[588] Asian rhetoricians may have been favoured by Antony, who had a very exuberant oratorical style. On Dionysius and the historians, Gabba 1982: 51.

within a concept of geography and of history as universal.[589] For Strabo, on the political and military level, Parthia is on an equal ground with Rome. For these reasons, she managed to conquer an empire which is, for its extension and importance, similar to that of Rome. But the Romans had the bigger and better part and the universal dimension of Rome's empire would not have been possible without the mediation of the Hellenes.[590] Thus, Parthia is inferior in respect to geographical location and cultural heritage. Although Parthia is neither a subject nor an ally or client kingdom, Roman superiority is confirmed. In the spectrum of Augustan ambiguity, he sits on the far end, very close to Parthian independence. From his angle, the Parthians can at the same time keep their political independence, their barren land, not be a client state and be inferior to Rome. Strabo has squared the circle. However, without universality (that is, without the combination of expanded territorial domain with Greek knowledge which is a pre-requisite for the enfranchising of the Romans from their status of barbarians), Rome and Parthia would be destined to headlong crash and the subordinate relationship (mild but subordinate) mentioned in 6.4.2 would not be possible, neither it would be possible for the Romans to be in such state of peace and abundance that Augustus has granted.

If for Strabo Rome is the centre of a Greco-Roman world, Macedonia is at the centre of Trogus' world, but not in the way Rome is the centre for, let us say, Livy. Macedonia is, for a period, at the centre of a process.[591] While focussing on the period in

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[589] On Strabo as universal historian (or geographer): Alonso-Núñez 1984: 53-54; Engels 1999: 257-60, Clarke 1999: 226-28, 256-57.

[590] Strabo 9.2.2 C401. See the analysis of the passage by Vannotti 1993. See also Strabo 2.5.26 noting that the Romans, with the strength of their empire and thanks to Greek influence, are responsible for the civil and cultural advancement of the world.

[591] The succession to Alexander is a flurry of battles and struggles but is treated as a unique event (even the death of Alexander is a Macedonian affair: he was killed by his fellow countrymen 12.16.12): the empire is still Macedonian and Trogus will follow the evolution of it until the rise of the two powers that will bring the story of the Macedonian power to the end.

which Macedonia conquered, held, and lost the world, the *Historiae Philippicae* looks at the rise and fall of several empires and does so according to a mechanism of transition of power (*translatio imperii*) that is explained at the beginning of the first book.[592] The passage of power follows a scheme that includes two factors: decadence of an existing ruling group and the presence of a suitable competitor (or more than one), ready to take over. While within the competing groups rise and fall develop from similar premises, the creation of the empire is an accretive process whereby more land is seized and more civilization is acquired. In this sense, the story of the preceding empires represents an introduction and the presentation of the mechanism within which the period of Macedonian hegemony must be framed. So, the question is: who took the place of the Macedonians? If one looks at the end of the Macedonian hegemony and applies the system of universal history and succession of empires, it has to be acknowledged that now its place has been taken by Rome *and* Parthia. For geographical reasons, that is, because Parthia and Rome both occupy parts of the post-Alexandrian empires and seized those parts from the descendants of the Diadochi, and because they both fit perfectly with the historical pattern of *translatio imperii* outlined above, they tick all the boxes, so to speak.[593]

[592] 1.1.3, 1.1.7-8.

[593] I am not suggesting that Trogus was 'prisoner' of the mechanism that he had adopted to explain the historical process. Parthia and Rome tick all the boxes because Trogus presented events in such a way that made them do so. On Trogus and universal history: Yarrow, 2006: 124.On *translatio imperii* and its working in Trogus: Alonso-Nùñez 2002: 105-10, Austin 2003: 124-26, 129-30. On the Hellenistic perspective of Trogus: Mineo 2016: 201-204. On Trogus' position towards Rome, un-Roman: Levene, 2011, 288-89; provincial: Nuñez, 1987, 59-70 and 59, Yarrow, 2006, 148-49, 346-477; critical or anti-Roman: Adler, 2011, 41 (with bibliography on page 222 n15 and 16); in harmony with the Augustan conception: Mineo 2016, Thornton 2016: 23-29. For an overview of all these themes and Trogus' Parthian chapters: Borgna 2018: 157-202. On why did Trogus *decide* to conclude with a polarized world see Bianchetti 2014 (opposition between Romans civilised, heirs of the Greeks and Parthians, barbarians, influenced by the Scythians), Cresci-Marrone 1993 and Franco 1993: 87-89 (parallel between Augustus and Alexander), Liebmann-Frankfort 1969: 911 (sources).

In short, 'gentle' universal ideology and *translatio imperii* represent the key concepts for the understanding of Parthian equality in Strabo and Trogus. Gentle universality and equality are logically incompatible with the assimilation of the Parthian Wars with the Persian Wars, since the myth of the latter is based on the premise that Greeks and Persians cannot be equals. It is not a coincidence that there is no trace of this association in any of the gentle universalists.

4. Persian Wars, horography and the Parthians.

As I have tried to show, the Battle of Actium does not seem to have had an important role in promoting the revival of the Persian Wars. The parallel Parthian Wars / Persian Wars exists but it is not particularly common at Rome even less so in the thirties BCE and its centrality within the context of the inauguration of the temple of *Mars Ultor* is largely unwarranted.

The first incontrovertible associations between the Persian Wars and the Parthian Wars come, after 20 BCE, from the city of Athens. There is – possibly – the tripod in the Olympieion mentioned by Pausania (1.18.8), perhaps dedicated by Augustus. Then, there is the circular *monopteros*, resembling that of *Mars Ultor* voted by the senate, that was built on the Acropolis and dedicated to Rome and Augustus, possibly to host the standards for a period during Augustus' sojourn in Athens on his way back to Rome in 19 BCE.[594] It was located between the Parthenon (a monument closely linked to the Greek

[594] Rose 1992: 51, Baldessari 1995 (especially for the dating and historical background), on the dedication Schmalz 1983: 80-82. Whitteker von Hofsten (2002) argues for the dating of the temple of Augustus and Roma on the Acropolis after 10BCE in connection to the visit of Gaius to the city.

victory over the Persians and to the victories of Alexander) and the monument erected by Attalus which commemorated the victory over the East. The message seems to be clear. Victory over Parthia corresponds to victory over Persia. But what is the ideological significance of this 'quotation'? Among the many cities that had supported Antony, Athens stands out for her prestige and constant backing up of the opponents of the Caesarian faction.[595] In 21-20 BCE, Augustus, began a process of reorganization of Greece. At Athens it was carried on by his local supporters and took the form of a methodical appropriation and assimilation between the Athenian and the Roman well attested, for example, in the religious sphere and in the building programme in the Agora.[596] From this perspective, the decision to erect a temple to celebrate the success over Parthia can be interpreted as an assertion of superiority on part of Augustus through the appropriation of Athenian past (including, obviously, the Persian Wars) and of the heritage of Alexander.[597] That is, the Romans are taking over the baton from the Greeks. There is another way to see the matter, however. Susan Alcock has alerted us to the

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[595] Hoff 1984. Anti-Caesarians in Athens in the years 50-42, Habicht 1997: 356-59. On Athens and Antony, see Bowersock 1984, Galinski 1996: 361, Huzar 1978: 156, Habicht 1997: 360-65. Some of the closest associates of Antony had statues at Athens (L. Marcius Censorinus, L. Munatius Plancus, G. Cocceius Balbus, and the daughter of L. Sempronius Atratinus, see Habicht 1997: 360). Some of them were still around, although not in a preeminent position, under Augustus (Plancus and Censorinus, cf. Syme 1939: 380).

[596] Context of the measures taken in 21-20: Schmalz 1996. Agora: Torelli 1995, discusses the slow but constant appropriation of the Agora by Augustus (through the agency of Agrippa) until it became 'quasi un possesso personale' (31). Lozano (2002: 22-56) traces the development of the imperial cult in Athens. It was a joint effort between the Roman power and the local elite that allowed the diffusion of the cult of the divinized Augustus and his family. The relationship between Augustus (Rome) and Greece (Hellenism – Athens) is argument of discussion. Among many who approached the issue there are Swain 1996: 409-13, Spawforth 2012 and Copete 2015.

[597] O'Sullivan 2016: 354. Augustan agency is suggested by the intermediation of Panemes, a member of a prominent family, possibly connected by patronage to Agrippa, and one of the priests of the cult of Augustus and Roma, whose name appears in the dedication (Lozano 2002: 23-25). On Augustan normalization of Alexander, see Spencer 2002: 260; it was vital not to be marginalised as a Roman playing at Alexander in a decadent eastern getto. Positive Alexander imagery ... needed to be assimilated into mainstream Roman understanding of successful imperialism, and neutralized.' Schäfer (1998: 49-59) supposes that the Athenian temple was personally instigated by Augustus.

ambiguity that such initiatives based on the recovery of a mythicized past may imply.[598] In a discussion on the reconfiguration of the Agora in the Augustan and Julio-Claudian period she points out that the building programme can surely be read as an attempt to harmonize the interests of the local elite and the ruling power but underlines that, according to the background of the observer, it is possible to envisage a completely opposite interpretation of the ideological meaning conveyed by these monuments. She contends that for a certain sector of the Greek public (Athenian, not belonging to the elite favourable to Augustus) the restored Agora, because it harked back to the Athenian glory-days, was a 'monument of the past', even an ideological rallying point for resistance.[599] The erection of the *monopteros*, therefore, could be similarly interpreted as a homage or as a symptom of ideological revanchism, with the Greeks bringing the Romans within their own historical horizon. If it is correct that the temple was hastily built by the Athenians on their own initiative (rather than upon the *princeps'* instigation) in the years between 20 and 19, as soon as the news of the *senatus cosultum* had reached the city, to ingratiate the emperor after the punitive measures of 22/21 BCE, then the double meaning of the homage acquires even more solidity.[600] Especially considering that Athenian discontent with Augustus must have gone beyond mere opportunism or the unfortunate coincidence of being on the side of the Mediterranean Sea chosen by the losing parties. In fact, well after Actium and until Augustus' death, the city manifested her disaffection towards the new leader in several episodes.[601] The restoration of the

[598] 2002: 51-71.
[599] Alcock 2002: 68.
[600] Rose 2005: 50-52, Spawforth 2012: 106-07.
[601] In the 20's BCE there was an ominous portent involving the statue of Athena turning towards Rome and spitting blood that, according to Dio, prompted a punitive reaction of Augustus (Dio 54.7.2-3; Hoff 1989). For an alternative explanation, see Schmalz 1996: 385-86.

monuments and shrines associated to Salamis and the Persian Wars discussed by Antony Spawforth can be read in a similar manner.[602] No wonder that the decree sanctioning the repairs was approved with large majority. Cohesion of the citizenry around a theme of their past did not imply ideological unity.[603]

The Athenian habit of framing celebrative monuments with allusions to earlier victories is a recurring one and, of all the victories Athens could be proud of, the Persian Wars were undoubtedly the number one.[604] The idea that the triumph of Greece over the invading empire, based on the assumption that its power will not be eternal, is exactly the kind of particularism that had prompted Athens' resistance to Sulla, and it is exactly the reason why the prophecies on the revenge of Asia were received without reluctance. If empires rise and fall, it is easy to understand the relevance of the Persian precedent, an empire whose trajectory anticipates that of the Roman Empire. It is exemplarity on large scale. These notions, which had political implications not only for the power of Rome but also for the primacy of Augustus, provided the ideological background for all manners of opposition and this is exactly what the *princeps* had been trying to eradicate.

Resistance proved to be resilient (even if subterranean). Despite Augustus' efforts, the opposition tended to cluster in the East for a long period after 20 BCE and, in 9 CE, there was even a revolution in Athens. Dissatisfaction took also less open forms. Bowersock has suggested that Athens had been involved in the competition between the

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[602] 2012: 106-17.
[603] Spawforth 2012: 112.
[604] Athens set up statues of Caesar's assassins, Brutus and Cassius, next to those of the Tyrannicides (Dio 47.20.4). The temple of Ares (an unpopular god in Greece but one of the Romans' favourites), whose relocation to the Agora has been explained as an homage to Gaius on his way to Syria, was soon colonized by Athenian heroes (Pausania 1.18.4-5 cf. Alcock 2002: 55-56). Alcock (2002: 74-88) also discusses the subversive power of the memory of the Persian Wars, a power that 'had to be restrained, and their celebration monitored' (85).

possible candidates to the throne of Augustus and the discontents rallied around Tiberius in the years of his residence / exile at Rhodes (6 BCE – 2 CE). He argues that the main purpose of the expedition of Gaius was to counter Augustus' stepson's increasing popularity in the East, and to promote the new designed heir. In other words, the lingering hostility towards the regime may have played a role in the events of 2 BCE and the 'farewell show' could be interpreted as a show put on for the Greeks and the Athenians to remind them who was in charge, rather than for the sake of the military campaign against Parthia.[605] If so, the celebration, its setting, and the events associated to it such as the *ludus Troianus* and the *naumachia* would place the Romans in the position of the rightful heirs of Athens, the new Athenians and of the descendants of Troy. The entire history of the Hellenised eastern Mediterranean would then converge onto the forum – temple complex, a symbolic centre of power that ties Rome inextricably to Augustus and the imperial family. Any inconsistency between the setting of the pageant and its ideological content disappears.

Conclusion

The empire was vast, local traditions varied substantially from one place to another. The appropriation of dangerous ideas may have taken various forms and surely evolved through time. But Augustus' approach was not dogmatic as shown by the attempt to negotiate between the two tensions intrinsic to Augustan universalism and to tie up all these lose ends into an organic – conciliatory – ideology. Thus, Virgil could have thought of the Giants when describing the battle of Actium, oriental boys could appear in various

[605] Upheaval Bowersock 1965: 106-09, Hoff 1989: 275 (13 CE). Bowersock does not deny an interest in the East but reduces the importance of the supposed Parthian campaign, Bowersock 1984: 173.

artworks all around Rome without that having to mean revival of the Persian Wars. Similarly, some localized revelling in the glories of the past or the reprisal of Hellenistic models (e.g. deification, or the idea of kingship) could be accepted, provided that the emperor was always there to calm excessive enthusiasms, to avoid dangerous peaks of nationalism and to make clear that all this remained under his aegis and that of Rome. He knew that it is easier to defuse any sources of instability by turning them to his advantage and absorbing them, rather than by head-on opposition.

The adoption of Athenian classicism and gentle universalism become, therefore, part of the strategy aiming to create a common culture and unity in the empire. It was important in countering the opposition in the East which, from the cultural point of view, took various forms: Asianism and Mithridatism imbued with universal ideology in Asia in the 80's BCE, revival of the Athenian past glories and localism in Attica after Actium. It was not a top down, calculated decision. It was a reaction. So was the parallel between Parthian and Persian Wars. It was within this process of historical revisionism that the Parthians were assimilated to the Persians. It occurred as a consequence of two concurrent events (the settlement of 20 BCE and the discontent in Greece), almost as a by-product. Hence the ambiguity.

The necessity to counter opposition to the *princeps* combined with Greek nationalism helps to explain why, after leaving Antony's settlement essentially unmodified and setting out to work on winning over the allegiance of the allied rulers and of the powerful families of the eastern provinces, the *princeps* started an ambitious cultural programme that combined Greek and Roman motives and styles. It provides insight into why, if not guided by, at least with the approval of the emperor, some eminent poets moved to fill the cultural gap between Rome and Greece and of

elaborating a Romano-centric version of universal history. It helps our understanding of why Strabo's, Trogus' and other Greek literates' promotion of a third way to understand Rome's world hegemony and her place in history encountered the support of the ruler.[606] The appropriation of the Greek past glories in the building projects of Augustus and the endorsement of the intellectuals who rewrote the history and geography of the world in universal and teleological terms placing Persia, Athens and their clash in the role of a precedent not to be emulated but that had been surpassed and absorbed by Rome, are two sides of the same coin. Within this picture a coherent meaning can be found not only for the symbolism of the Forum of Augustus and the appropriation of Athenian classicism, but also the choice of Actium for the memorial of the victory over Cleopatra and Antony. Where, apart from Rome, could the *princeps'* victory be glorified while, at the same time, conciliation be promoted? The Egyptian Nicopolis would have been a possible option, but, perhaps, not ideal if one of the goals was the pacification of the Greek world. Egypt had been an independent enemy state and had been defeated. A trophy there could only stress victory not appeasement. Athens, the cultural capital of Greece, If she was ever considered, was also problematic for its support for Antony, opposition needed to be absorbed not bullied. The most logical site was the site of the battle in Greece. In this light also the conspicuous involvement of a former supporter of Antony, Herod the Great, in the financing of many building projects at Nicopolis fits seamlessly (Joseph. *AJ* 16.148). It was a demonstration of acceptance of new leadership and contribution to the new order in one of the centres of 'euergetistic attention' for the oriental side of the

[606] Poets filling the gap: Levi 1986: 312-345 esp. 312. Livy Dionysius and Strabo moved to Rome around 30 BCE, they were followed by many, Timagenes was there already (Bowersock 1965: 123).

Mediterranean, a glaring example of alignment with the trends emanating from Rome for all the Eastern notables.[607]

Finally, even the apparent paradox of the insistence on the Trojan (and therefore Asian) origins of the Romans acquires a better justification. As the descendent of Troy, Rome is at the same time the Asian element that returns after being defeated by the Greeks and the Greek element that has defeated the Persians. Forty years after Pompey's triumph the factors of the equation are the same: Persian memories and Rome's imperial aspirations. It is the context that has changed, with normalisation replacing competition and undisputed rule of one man substituting Republican institutions. The universal empire of Rome can live forever because it integrates its precedents. Rome is the centre of power where everything (Greek past, Persian invasions, eastern kingship, Egyptian prosperity, etc.) is blended into an idea of universal empire under the watchful eye of the Roman Emperor. In other words, Rome embodies at the same time both the tradition of Greece and the mingling that never occurred between Persians and Greeks. The normalization is total, or, if a slight semantical imprecision is allowed, universal.

[607] Purcell 1987: 87. On Herod and Augustus: Galinsky 2009, Marshak 2015: 139-73. In many ways Herod could be seen as the ideal subject: loyal to Rome and ready to fulfil the obligations of his role.

CHAPTER THREE

LIFE UNDER AN AUTOCRAT: THE CREATION OF A PERSIAN MONSTER.

Something else remarkable was going on while Augustus was busy normalizing the empire and working on consolidating his ascendency in the East by incorporating the myth of the Persian Wars. The knowledge, images and biases related to Persia that had been borrowed from the Greeks (Persian luxury, the kings' enormous and pointless undertakings and impiety) and used in the last years of the Republic in the context of the rivalry between the warlords, were recoded and transformed. In a new Roman world in which the power was transferred from the aristocracy to the *princeps*, Persia, or, more precisely, the Persian kings, became a point of interest providing opportunities for those interested in exploring the idea of autocracy. In a process that combines the tendency to use historical anecdotes as educative paradigms,[608] the simplification of motivations and psychology of all the characters involved and the amplification of the failings of the king, a (fictional) figure of the Persian ruler was developed to represent the absolute autocrat incarnating all the faults and consequences that the concentration of power in the hands of a single individual could bring about.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the works of the authors who sample the rhetorical genre. It follows – in the works of the Elder Seneca and Valerius Maximus – the evolution of the most notorious of the Persian rulers, Xerxes, into a despot, arrogant, disrespectful to the gods and destroyer of nature and explores how the Persian king is codified as a moral exemplum. It also examines the persisting popularity of the two

[608] On exempla in Latin tradition see, Litchfields 1941, Van der Poel 2009: 332-53, Roller 2004, Kraus 2005: 181-200. Livy applies extensively and coherently exemplarity in his historiographical work (Chaplin 2000: 1-31). Definition of exemplum: *Rhet. Her.* 4.44.62 and Cic. *Inv.* 1.49.

episodes of the bridging of the Hellespont and the cutting of the Mount Athos and how, while other themes decay in favour, they acquire increasing moral significance.[609]

Subsequently, the focus moves on to the crucial figure in the development of these tendencies, the philosopher and politician Seneca, to investigate his extensive use of these and other Persian stories in the analysis of the role and place of absolute power at Rome. A brief survey of the works that followed his, will make clear that he contributed more than anybody else to the characterization of the Persian king as a tyrant and a monster of cruelty.

1. **Hellespont and Athos.**

These two episodes, which were firstly paired by fourth-century Athenians orators and were already famous well before they appeared in any Latin text, enjoyed constant popularity well into the Christian period, despite the fact that in the last decades of the first century BCE some cultured Romans (such as Propertius, who dismissed the cutting of the Athos as a conventional image), had already grown tired of the story.[610]

Leaving aside the problematic Ennius and Livy, it should be noted that Lucretius, in a passage that deals with the ephemerality of human life, alludes to Xerxes' bridge of boats as an example of the mutability of fortune.[611] Catullus cursorily mentions the cut

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[609] The size of Persian army, the weeping of Xerxes and the Persian love of luxury are stylised to the maximum; other topics such as the role of women at the court or the exploits of the Greeks and Persia as a precedent for empire fade into the background. On this process of simplification in Valerius Maximus, see Bridges 2014: 167-68.

[610] Propertius 2.1.17-26.

[611] 3.1029-1032. Cf. Bridges 2014: 165, compare to Sen. *Suas.* 5.1 and 5.5-6 and Pliny the Young *Ep.* 3.7.13.

of the promontory of the Mount Athos in one of his *Carmina*.[612] Manilius reiterates various times the theme of the bridging of the Hellespont and seems to be very fond of the image of the sea under the ships.[613] Mela considers the crossing of the Hellespont quite an impressive deed while the Athos is mentioned without any connections between the two being established.[614] A few more examples could be quoted but it might be more interesting to make a few points about this *topos*.[615]

Few of the passages mentioned here require the reader to be aware of the consequences and moral implications of the actions of Xerxes (Lucretius is one of these few).[616] Although they are often taken to imply hybris, tyrannical attitudes and excessive self-confidence, they never come with a coherent development of these themes. If any transgressions can be detected it is only by inference (usually based on the assumption that the Romans shared the same conception of the Persian King with the Greeks). All passages mentioned are little more than proverbial expressions, considerations made en passant and, with only one exception (in Manilius' *Astronomica,* where both events are mentioned in the same place), the two episodes are treated separately.[617] Furthermore,

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[612] Catull. *Carm.* 66.43-66.
[613] Manilius 1.776, 3.19-23, 5.48-49 with Paratore 1966: 521, on Manilius see: Scarcia R., E. Flores and S. Feraboli 1996-2001.
[614] 2.26, 2.32.
[615] Allusions to bridge and/or canal in (possibly) Varro / Ennius (*Ling*. 7.21), Lucretius (3.1029-1034), Catullus (66.45-46), possibly Sallust (*Cat.* 13.1; 20.11), Cicero (*Fin.* 2.112), *Appendix Vergiliana*: the Culex (31-34), Propertius (2.1.22), Manilius (3.19-21; 5.48-49), Velleius Paterculus (2.33.4), Mela (2.26; 2.32), Pliny the Elder *NH*(4.10.37; 4.12.76), Seneca the Elder (*Suas.* 2.3), Seneca the Younger (*Ben.* 6.3.6), Lucan (2.672-677), Suetonius (*Cal*. 19.3), Juvenal (10.173-187), Florus (2.8.2), Justinus (2.10.24), *the Latin Anthology* (239, 442, 461), Arnobius (*Adv. Gen.* 1.5), Ammianus Marcellinus (22.8.2,4), Claudius Claudianus (*In Rufinum* 1.335-336), Jerome (*Ep.* 60.18) and Sidonius Apollinaris (*Carm.* 5.451-455) (from Rosivach 1984, with some modifications).
[616] This is also valid for those referring to Xerxes mentioned in the previous chapters to which we may add Cic. *Tusc.* 5.7.20, *Rep.* 3.9.14, Cic. *Leg.* 2.26, cf. *Nat. D.* 1.115.
[617] *Astronomica* 5.48-49. In Herodotus the two events are not presented as strictly associated (Rosivach 1984: 4-5), for a discussion on Herodotus' position, cf. Bridges 2014: 56-58 and 163-70. It is only later, in the work of fourth century Athenian rhetoricians that the bridge and the canal are paired (cf. Lysias *Epitaphios* 29, Isocrates *Paneg.* 89 with Bridges 2014: 108-09). Afterwards, they appear together, for example, in Lycophron's *Alexandra* (1414-1416, cf. West 2009: 90-92).

if the themes were relatively popular, their popularity, however, is not spread across the board. Nepos (who dedicates several of his biographies to the Persian kings and the Greek generals who interacted with them) essentially ignores the two events. Even Cicero mentions them only in one place where he also implicitly admits that conquering Greece is not a mean feat thereby somewhat justifying the size of Xerxes' army.[618] In the Augustan poets, among very few scattered allusions to the wealth of Persia (and Media) in Virgil and Horace and to cruelty (or, more accurately, fraudulence) in Ovid, there is only one explicit reference to these events.[619] It is the cutting of the Athos in the aforementioned passage in Propertius. Finally, none of the passages mentioning the Persian king quoted so far includes any references to tyranny, mentions, alludes to (implicitly or explicitly), or contextualizes Persian *superbia* and cruelty in any significant way. Take Lucretius, for example. The moral element is explicit and straightforward. Xerxes is a king with enormous resources and the point is simply that it does not matter how powerful one may be, how many men one can muster, how great the endeavours he can accomplish, he/she will die as anybody else.

2. Athos, Hellespont, Alexander and Persian Kings in Seneca Senior and Valerius Maximus.

In the writers of the late Republic and early Augustan period the characterization of the Persians centres on impiety, luxury and enormous undertakings. They make use of a (small but varied) array of Persian stories, sometimes used as rhetorical ornaments,

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[618] in *Fin*. 2.111-112. Interesting here the opposition between Xerxes and the Stoic sage.
[619] Virg. *Georg.* 2.136, Hor. *Carm.* 3.9.4; Ovid *Ibis* 315-316.

sometimes as representative of some moral quality. Among these stories, the crossing of the Hellespont and the cutting of the Mount Athos are mentioned several times but hardly ever are they meant to be anything more than a catchphrase and their juxtaposition is not very common. The same does not apply to the collections of Seneca Elder and Valerius. In their work, Xerxes is the prototype of the Persian king (surely in Seneca, less so in Valerius) and the two aforementioned episodes of the Bridge over the Hellespont and the cutting of the Athos become representative of his faults. In addition to the usual impiety and defiance of the gods, they acquire a more defined symbolic meaning, namely, insolence toward nature and destruction of the landscape.

There are two loci which deal with the memory of Persia in Seneca. The second *Suasoria*, which elaborates on the topic 'the Spartans at the Thermopylae deliberate on standing their ground or retire', and the fifth, where 'the Athenians deliberate over whether they had to remove the trophies since Xerxes threatened to return if they should not'.[620] When it comes to the characterization of Persia the variety of themes is rather limited and predictable. There is the cutting of the Athos' peninsula, the bridge over the Hellespont,[621] and the vastness of Xerxes' army.[622] These colossal enterprises are used to demonstrate that the Persian king should be feared, but, more interestingly, they are evidence that Xerxes inflicts damage to nature and to the order of the universe, an attitude that transcends into hubris and defiance of the gods, and, if not curbed, would

[620] *Suas.* 2: *Trecenti Lacones contra Xersen missi, cum treceni ex omni Graecia missi fugissent, deliberant, an et ipsi fugiant; Suas.* 5: *Deliberant Athenienses, an tropaea Persica tollant Xerse minante rediturum se, nisi tollerentur.* (Translation: Winterbottom, Loeb)
[621] 2.3, 2.17, 2.18 and 5.7.
[622] 2.1, 5.2 and 5.8.

extend to cover the entire world.[623] Wealth and defeat may be glimpsed in the text as well, but they are more suggested than asserted.[624]

The bridge and Mount Athos appear, in Valerius' *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia*, duly juxtaposed, to exemplify the insolence of Xerxes towards nature, the gods and his subjects, in the external exemplum in which the *fortitudo* of Leonidas is extolled.[625]

> [Leonidas] *apud Thermopylas toti Asiae obiectus grauem illum et mari et terrae Xerxen, nec hominibus tantum terribilem, sed Neptuno quoque compedes et caelo tenebras minitantem, pertinacia uirtutis ad ultimam desperationem redegit.*
>
> Valerius Maximus 3.2 ext.3
>
> [Leonidas] had to face all Asia at Thermopylae and by determined valour he reduced Xerxes, that bully of sea and land, not only terrible to men but threatening even Neptune with chains and the sky with darkness, to ultimate desperation. (Shackleton Bailey, Loeb)

[623] 2.3: *Maria terrasque, rerum naturam statione mutavit sua* ('He has moved seas, lands, nature itself from her position') (*rerum naturae* = the order / natural course of things (*OLD* 1275) the world, cf. Cic. *Acad*. 2.17.54-55. 2.18: *terras armis obsidet, caelum sagittis, maria vinculis; Lacones, nisi succurritis, mundus captus est.* ('He besieges land with arms, heaven with arrows, seas with chains. Unless you go to the rescue, Spartans, the universe is at his feet.').

[624] The wealth of Persia is mainly an inexhaustible richness of men (*Suas.* 5.2 and 5.8) but no references to luxury items, pearls, India or commerce of any significance whatsoever.

[625] Cf. also 9.5 ext. 2 for another example of arrogance towards the subjects.

Xerxes is a burden for (*gravem*) land and sea, terrible towards men (*hominibus … terribilem*), and he also dares to threaten the gods with chains (*Neptuno quoque compedes*) and the sky with darkness (*caelo tenebras minitantem*) with obvious references to the chaining of the Hellespont and the arrows blackening the sky. The sense of heaviness inherent in the word *gravem* well suits the weight of the enormous Persian army marching over land and sea, while the adjective *terribilis* seems to allude to the dreadful consequences of the hopeless campaign against Greece – the death of many Asians – rather than to cruel attitude or violence. Slightly more puzzling is the allusion to the Hellespont and Athos at 1.6.ext. 1 and 1b, where the concealing of the sea with ships and of the land with soldiers is, somewhat inconsistently, juxtaposed to an otherwise unknown portent that includes the transformation of wine into blood. At any rate, the underlying concept is clear enough: the anecdote is meant to suggest Xerxes' lack of respect for the gods.

Impiety and geographical disruption do not exhaust the qualities of Xerxes. Seneca tells us that he is arrogant and insolent. Valerius uses a similar set of adjectives: lustful, excessively attached to life and effeminate, arrogant and unrestrained.[626] However he, unlike Seneca, also mentions other Persian kings and sometimes he ascribes to them commendable deeds.[627] The best example, which is also representative of the author's ambiguous attitude with respect to the Persians, is the story of how Darius I became king. It is worth discussing this further.[628] In the section dedicated to prowess,

[626] In Seneca, Xerxes' impiety is reiterated, although not in relation to the Athos and the bridge of boats, at *Suas.* 5.1, 5.4, 5.8; his arrogance at *Suas.* 2.7, 2.22 (*insolens*), 5.5 (*superbus*) and 5.8 (*tumens*). Valerus Maximus respectively: 9.1 ext. 3, 9.13 ext. 1 (the section's heading is *de cupiditate vitae* but these men are also feeble and effeminate (*enerves et effemintatos* 9.13 praef.)), 9.5 ext. 2.

[627] Xerxes is the only Persian king named in all Seneca's works.

[628] 3.2 ext. 2.

Valerius narrates that Darius, while holding down one of the Magi who had usurped the throne of Persia, urged his companion not to hesitate for fear that he could be injured and to stab the usurper even though this might have meant the loss of his (Darius') life.[629] The gist of the story is that a Persian king can be brave and unselfish when the well-being of the fatherland is at stake. What is surprising is the fact that Valerius modifies an episode from Herodotus to convey Darius' unselfishness and to make a case for the bravery of a foreign king in the face of death.[630] The consequence of Valerius' treatment of the material is that Darius not only becomes an example of courage but also a true beacon of heroism and love for the fatherland. His acts are noble (*preclari operis*) and he is clearly unselfish and interested only in the good of the Persians. Thus, in an almost paradoxical situation, Darius becomes a tyrant-slayer who frees the Persians from the tyranny of the cruel and debased *Magi*.[631] Whether the confusion and omissions in the original story is the result of Valerius' poor memory, intentional or coincidental, the fact is that Darius is a positive example, whose behaviour is well worthy of a Roman; this is a detail that Valerius (or his readers) could not have missed, especially considering that Darius' act of bravery appears after a long list of examples of valour including the crème de la crème of Roman heroes, from Marcellus to Cato. This seems to contradict any a-priori assumption that a Persian king (with the exclusion of the idealized Cyrus II) is

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[629] *vel per utrumque illum agas licet, dum hic quam celerrime pereat*. 'You may drive it through both of us, so long as he dies as soon as may be.'

[630] There is a number of different versions of the episode and none seems to coincide with Valerius' one. According to Herodotus (3.78.4-5), it is Gobryas who embraces the Magus and who urges Darius not to care about his life. In Herodotus, moreover, Darius comes out much less bold than in Valerius not only because his life is not in danger but also because he seems hesitant (see Asheri 2007: 294-95). Justin (1.9.22-23) has a very similar sequence of events with Gobryas holding down the magus but the identity of the stabber is not given. Another display of Darius' magnanimity at 5.2 ext. 1. Another muddle of Herodotean material at 6.9 ext. 5.

[631] *Cum sordida et crudeli magorum tyrannide Persas liberaret* ('As he was freeing the Persians from the shabby and cruel tyranny of the magi')

selfish, arrogant and, ultimately, a tyrant. With this in mind, it is remarkable that Valerius decided to place this story before the paragraph in which Xerxes is brought to desperation by Leonidas to whom Darius is compared for his gallantry.[632] A Persian tyrant slayer operating for the good of his country and people is juxtaposed with a Persian tyrant that works against everything he should safeguard and respect, including his fellow citizens.

Even more striking are the contradictions in the speeches of Seneca's rhetors. The enormity of the Persian army and the inexhaustible resources of the Persian Empire (5.2, 5.8) coexist with the idea that the whole of Asia had been reduced to nothing by the defeat at Salamis and Platea (5.5). The cutting of mount Athos can be, at the same time, a perpetual memento of the power of Asia, a monument celebrating the strength of the Greeks (who defeated a man capable of such endeavour; 3.17) and a symbol of defeat (who would not recall the defeat of the Persians when looking at Athos? 5.7). No great surprise, one may think. Seneca's florilegium of rhetorical ability cannot be, by its own nature, coherent. And Valerius compiled a collection of anecdotes in which he appears to be more interested in the moral content of his short sketches than in the characters he uses.[633] Yet, a pattern can be envisaged. In both Seneca and Valerius, Xerxes' character goes through a stylization in the moral meaning of his acts. He is distinctive for his lack of

[632] 3.3 ext. 3.

[633] Coherence in Seneca. Obviously, since Seneca was reporting other rhetoricians' speeches and each speaker would select one or another interpretation in accordance with his purpose, there cannot be consistency. On declamation as *iuvenile studium* ('study belonging to youth') and *non seria res* where facts and even logic to some extent, can be bent, see Sen. *Contr.* 10 praef. 1, with *Suas*. 6.16, and Seneca's comment about the speech of Gallio in *Suas.* 5. On the issue Berti 2007: 220-22 and Bonner 1949: 72.
Coherence in Valerius. This issue is inextricably linked with one of the crucial of Valerius' exegesis: the definition of the nature of his work. If coherence in his work can be found, it is in his moral or possibly in his political position, not in the characterization of the personages or in the consistency of the exempla across the collection (Bloomer 1992: 154). On the purpose of Valerius' work (political, moral, or educational), see Skidmore 1989: xvi-vi and 53 *passim* (moral) and Bloomer 1992: 255 (educational).

respect for the gods and his arrogance and, more conspicuously, in the way his flaws manifest; that is, through the disrespect of the limits imposed by nature, exemplified by his actions in Propontis and in the Chalkidiki peninsula. This is complemented by a simplification in the choice and in the treatment of Persian stories which still come with a great amount of stereotyping and disregard for consistency. The place and role of the Persian kings, however, is not codified yet.

Alexander.

Before moving to consider how the Persian King becomes a personification of tyranny, it is appropriate to rapidly assess another character that evolves along analogous lines: Alexander the Great. The importance of the figure of Alexander for Mithridates, Pompey and Augustus has already been noted. It has also been suggested that the potential ambivalence of his character may have induced Augustus to reduce his *imitatio* of the Macedonian. Now, just as the Persian King, Alexander goes through a process of transformation and simplification to become an example of violation of the limits (natural and divine), excessive behaviour and, eventually, cruelty and tyranny. It is not a coincidence that the two (Xerxes and Alexander) will appear frequently together. Some of these features appear in Seneca's first *Suasoria*, a piece entirely dedicated to the Macedonian, but whose real protagonist is the Ocean, an infinite water expanse, eternal, unchanging and full of monsters that cannot be navigated and behind which there is nothing.[634] And this is only the first of sixteen paragraphs of the most elaborate example of the conception of the Ocean as a natural limit in Latin literature culminating in the long

[634] Respectively: 1.1 *nihil infinitum est nisi Oceanus*; *Stat immotum mare, quasi deficientis in suo fine naturae pigra moles; novae ac terribiles figura, magna etiam Oceano portenta*; *Oceanus navigari non potest; post Oceanum nihil.*

excerpt from the poem by Pedo.[635] Alexander is pictured standing on the shore and longing for knowing what lies beyond it. Devoured by an uncontainable desire to cross, swollen with pride as if he were a god, deaf to the advice of his friends and mentor he cannot set a limit to his own ambitions and it is only the insurmountability of the waters that stops him. Through the description of the Ocean, the excessiveness of Alexander's aspiration is emphasised. Arrogant and insolent, he is the paradigm of those who are prompted by a desire of glory on which he cannot exert control.[636] Valerius reflects a similar attitude when he glosses on Alexander's reaction after his discovery of Democritos' claim that there existed many worlds by noting that 'a holding that suffices for the domicile of all the gods was not large enough for one glory-hungry man'.[637]

Xerxes and Alexander as tyrants.

Excessive wealth, luxury, pleasure and disrespect for what has been divinely sanctioned (also characteristics of Alexander and Xerxes) are common markers of tyrannical attitude. There is no doubt that Persian kings had a long record of being perceived as despots.[638] And yet, none of the writers mentioned so far builds a consistent image of the Persian king as a prototypical tyrant. The Romans had a slightly different idea of tyranny, if compared to the Greeks. If educated, they would certainly have read the works of

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[635] Ocean as the fixed limit of everything that, as the sky, should not be crossed, 1.3. On the *Suasoria*, see Migliario 2007: 58-67. On the poem of Pedo (1.15), Tandoi 1964 and 1967.
[636] *Orbi illum sui non capit* (1.5 'the world is not enough [to him]') *superbissimus et supra mortalis animi modum inflatos … ipsa suasoria insolentia eius coarguit* (1.5). On Alexander (in the *suasoria*) as model for Roman imperialism and on boundaries as a sort of proxy for self-control, see Spencer 2002: 138-44, Migliario 2007: 64-72. On the issue of the relationship subject-king, the mechanism of the relation advisor-ruler and related problems in the Anneii, see Spencer 2002: 64-75.
[637] 8.14 ext. 2. Alexander says: '*heu me' inquit 'miserum, quod ne uno quidem adhuc sum potitus!'* ('Alas for me, I have not yet made myself master of one!). Valerius' comment is: *angusta homini possessio fuit, quae deorum omnium domicilio sufficit*. Wardle (2005 especially 152-53) discusses Alexander in Valerius.
[638] Cf. Aristotle *Pol.* 1324a-b and *Pol.* 1297b, Plato *Leg.* 693a2-3.

Aristotle on the different types of government, watched Greek tragedies, read the histories of Herodotus and Thucydides and studied the Athenian orators of the fourth century. Through these readings they would have become acquainted with the Greek model of tyranny. However, they would also have had the memory of their own first-hand experience of autocrats because they had been exposed to oppressive kings, to warlords and had experienced oriental absolute rulers (e.g. the Hellenistic kings). They would have known of politicians who sought popular support (e.g. the Gracchi) and caused the reaction of the aristocracy who saw their prerogatives threatened by them.[639] The Roman idea of tyrant is the combination of these experiences. From the Greek prototype they took two main points. First, that the tyrant was more interested in his own good than in the good of the subjects / state and that his rule was despotic, based on force and accepted unwillingly by the subjects.[640] Second, the moral failings correlated to tyranny: sacrilege, wariness, oppressiveness, arrogance, capriciousness and violence. In the Roman discourse of tyranny there is no trace of what used to be the essential term of comparison for the tyrant – a city composed by equal men who identify themselves with the state – but only opposition between individuals: autocrat versus subject. Of the opposition democracy-tyranny, rooted in Athenian political culture, they kept little. This shift from the collective to the individual sphere is furthermore emphasised, in Roman authors, by the focus on the psychological mechanism of degeneration of the person placed in the position of absolute power. Because the ambition of the Roman tyrant is the preservation of the *regnum*, and because the experience of the civil wars had taught

[639] See Glinister 2006: 24.
[640] Isocrates *Paneg.* 166.

them that coercion and terror are instrumental in order to maintain power, the Romans added to these traditional features a greater emphasis on cruelty and deceptiveness. [641]

None of these elements appears in relation to the Achaemenids. The idea of tyranny may be considered implied when the Persian king is mentioned because it was implicit in his Greek characterization, but it is never necessary or relevant to the concept expressed. In search of paradigms of tyranny, the Romans looked elsewhere. A good candidate for the role it is probably Atreus.[642] Among historical figures, Tarquinius Superbus is the one that gets closer to the idea. He is cruel, rules through fear, has a penchant for causing damages to the aristocracy, is arrogant and overbearing. And then there is Sulla, who embodies all the defects of Tarquinius, only to a higher degree.[643]

Cicero and Nepos are illustrative of this orientation. Cicero's prototype of Roman tyrant is Sulla, an example of vice, iniquity, lack of *fides* and piety towards the fatherland.[644] In addition to Sulla he uses a variety of foreign examples all from Greek history. For example, in Cicero's *Verrinae*, where Verres is consistently presented to the audience as a tyrant, he is compared to Phalaris, Dionysus and several others among the

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[641] On the definition of the tyrant and interpretative problems, see the short introduction in/by Lewis 2006: 1-14. On Greek tyranny Raaflaub 2003: 59-84. On Greek tyranny and the transformation of the concept between Greece and Rome see Lanza 1977 *passim*. On the 'Roman tyrant' and its qualifications, see Dunkle (1967: 51) who defines the 'most characteristics vices of tyranny', *vis, superbia, libido* and *crudelitas*; Lanza (1977: 202) who distinguishes between traditional qualities (impiety, suspicion, violence) and new ones more peculiarly Roman (cruelty and deceptiveness or simulation); La Penna 1972 and *infra*. The motive of the cruelty of the tyrants can be found in *Rhet. ad Her.* 2.49, Cic. *Off.* 3.6.29, *Phil.* 13.8.18, in Livy 25.28.7, 29.17.20, Val. Max 3.12 and many more.

[642] Unfortunately, we have very little material. On Atreus, Accius, Seneca and tyranny, see La Penna 1972.

[643] The elaboration of the idea of the Roman tyrant, is a process that would reach its climax with the younger Seneca but was already ongoing in the time of Cicero – probably in connection with the elaboration of the tyrannical portrayal of Sulla. An example of the representation of Sulla as tyrant is in Sallust's *Historiae* (1.55.1M= McGushin 1.48.1=LaPenna 1.53.1, see also 1.55.22). On the transformation of Sulla in the years between 70 and 50 BCE into a bloodthirsty tyrant, see Laffi 1967: 260-77. On Sulla as tyrant and Seneca, see Lanza 1977: 201-07. For an assessment of the powers of Sulla, see Thein 2006.

[644] Cicero *Verr.* 2.3.81.

many that had plagued the island of Sicily but never to the Persian kings.[645] When the Persians are recalled, it is for the respect they showed for Delos and because of their custom of endowing cities to their many wives.[646] In the *de Lege Agraria,* Clodius is likened to the Greek tyrant who, by taking power, destroys all laws.[647] When meditating on the autocratic ambitions of Caesar, he remains uncertain as to whether he would prove to be a Phalaris or a Peisistratus, not a Darius or a Xerxes.[648] This does not mean that he has an idealised concept of the Persians. In fact, he notes that despite some kings being wise (Cyrus), Persians are ruled by autocrats and this is not desirable.[649] He uses Xerxes as an example of wealth and lack of self-restraint.[650] He equates episodes from Roman history to episodes of the Persian Wars when he mentions Salamina, Thermopylae, Platea, Marathon along with the deeds of Horatius Cocles, the Decii Mures, Scipio and Marcellus as themes frequently used as historical illustration by orators.[651] He places on the same level the ambitions of Cyrus and Alexander, both of whom had accomplished much in their short lives.[652] But the Persian king and tyranny are never coupled.

Nepos displays the same disinterest for univocally identifying the Persians with cruel tyrants. He suggests that satraps are despicable rulers (despotic and cowards) although this does not always imply reprobation.[653] He mentions Persian luxury but in

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[645] Verres 1.82: *tyrannum libidinosum crudelemque praebueris*; Phalaris 2.4.73: *crudelissimum omnium;* Dionysus 2.5.143: *crudelissimo*; others: 2.5.145.
[646] 2.3.76, Delos: 2.1.48 (although, Cicero reckons, they had declared war upon gods and men).
[647] *Leg. Agr.* 3.5; *in civitatibus instituit leges*, cannot apply to a Persian king.
[648] *Att.* 7.20.2 and 7.12.2. On Cicero and the Greek model of tyranny in some letters to Atticus, see Gildenhard 2006.
[649] Cic. *Rep.* 1.43. Cicero is aware that Xenophon's Cyrus is an idealized example of just ruler. Cic. *QFr.* 1.
[650] Cicero *Tusc.* 5.7.20. Also, on Xerxes' reputation for luxury: Cic. *Fin.* 8.68.
[651] *Off.* 1.61.
[652] *Brutus* 282.
[653] Pharnabazus: Nep. *Alcib*. 9-10, *Lys*. 4, *Dat*. 3 and *Con*. 2, Mardonius: *Paus.* 1, Tyribazus: *Con*. 5, Tyssaphernes: *Ages*. 2.

relation to its effect on the Greeks: some are corrupted by it but others resist it.[654] He revamps the Herodotean idea that united Greece is superior to Persia.[655] He singles out Xerxes for his impiety but asserts that the main reason for his fame is the enormous size of the army.[656] Other Persian kings are praised, Cyrus II and Darius I for having obtained a kingdom as private citizens, Artaxerxes I (Longimanus) for his handsomeness, military valour and generosity, Artaxerxes II (Memnon) for his justice.[657] The Persian tyrant is conspicuously absent.

The situation is undoubtedly similar in the works of Seneca the Elder and Valerius. Certainly, foreign autocrats appear more frequently. One only needs to compare the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* with Seneca's *Suasoriae*. Of the declamations (*deliberationes*) listed in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* all but one (which relates to Alexander) are of Roman argument.[658] The *Suasoriae,* written around a century after but attesting to the codification of the precepts that could be acquired from Xerxes' example in the years 35BCE – 35 CE, include (out of seven) two pieces on Alexander, one on Agamemnon and two in which Xerxes has a major role.[659] They also tend to become similar. The most glaring example comes from the first *Suasoria*. Here, to give a practical image of the inappropriateness of Alexander's desire and dimension of his ambition, Aartemon claims

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[654] Corrupted: *Alc.* 11, *Paus.* 3; resist: *Epam.* 4.2.

[655] *Ages.* 5.

[656] *De Reg.* 1.34, *Them.* 2.4-5 and 4 (impiety).

[657] Artaxerxes I Nep. *Reg*. 1.4 (*virtute belli)*, *Them.* 10; Artaxerxes II Nep. *Reg.* 1.4 *iustitiae fama floruit*

[658] *Suas.* 4.22.30. On the theme of Alexander longing for crossing the Ocean as a peculiarly Roman one and its first appearance in *Rhet. ad Her.* 4.22.31, see Tandoi (1967: 47). There is reason to believe that in the schools of rhetoric the theme of Alexander as an absolute tyrannical monarch and its connection to the political reality of the time was typical (Migliario 2007: 71). On the *Rhet. Ad Her*., see Calboli 1993: 3-42, on the date of composition *Idem:* 12-16. On the date of Seneca's *suasoriae* (between 20 and 34 CE) Edward 1928: xxvi-ii, Albrecht 1997: 1245 suggests between 37 and 41 CE.

[659] On the period covered by the collection and the single orators mentioned by Seneca, cf. Migliario 2007: 22-31. The increase in frequency of the *exempla externa* is general. In Cicero, 1/7 examples are foreign; the ratio is 1/3 in Valerius Maximus.

that crossing the Ocean is a greater breach than the crossing of the Hellespont.[660] The juxtaposition is by no means coincidental and perfectly exemplifies the similarity between Xerxes' and Alexander's desire to cross natural barriers and their defiance towards the gods.[661] Not only does their impiety appear everywhere, there is also a sense of universal expansion of the consequences of immoral behaviour. The actions of Xerxes do not only affect himself and his people (as in Aeschylus) but the entire human race and threaten to destabilize the whole world.[662] Alexander's actions are acceptable until he reaches the extreme waters, here impiety kicks in, his desire to conquer is an act of defiance towards the gods.[663] However, neither Alexander nor the Persians present the characteristics of a tyrant**.** Valerius' Persian kings may kill with smouldering ashes or bury a sister head down.[664] A satrap may crucify and let an enemy rot on a cross.[665] And yet, they are never presented as gratuitously savage and brutal despots. Each one of the examples of cruel behaviour has a reasonable explanation. Darius' inventive sentence of death (i.e. with smouldering ashes) does not stem from evil, but from the necessity to respect an oath. The gruesome details of the death of Polycrates are emphasised to exemplify the mutability of fortune, rather than the cruelty of Orontes. Moreover, none of the Persian excesses transcends their human condition (perhaps because, ultimately,

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[660] *Suas.* 1.11 *οὐ ταῖς Ἑλλησποντίαις ᾐόσιν ἐφεστῶτες οὐδ … ἱερώτερόν ἐστιν ἢ κατὰ ναῦς ὕδωρ* ('We are not standing on the shores of the Hellespont … in any case, it is water too holy for ships').

[661] *Suas.* 2.17-18 '*iste* [Xerxes], *qui classibus suis maria subripuit, qui terras circumscripsit, dilatavit profundum, novam rerum naturae faciem imperat, ponat sane contra caelum castra: commilitones habebo deos. Saenianus multo potentius dixit: terras armis obsidet, caelum sagittis, maria vinculis; Lacones, nisi succurritis, mundus captus est*. ('"A man who has stolen the seas with his fleets, who has set a limit to the earth, while extending the deep, who orders nature to put on a new look, can certainly fortify his camp against the sky: I shall have the gods in the ranks with me." Saenianus said, much more forcefully: "He besieges land with arms, heaven with arrows, seas with chains. Unless you go to the rescue, Spartans, the universe is at his feet."').

[662] *Suas*. 2.3 cf. note 617.

[663] Suas. 1.15.

[664] 9.2 ext.6, 9.2 ext. 7.

[665] 6.9 ext. 5.

they are considered not good enough) and, as mentioned, Darius I is brave and unselfish. Xerxes' arrogance never escalates to the level of physical or moral violence against people – he does not brutally punish his opposers nor torture them, not even as a means of enquiry – and he can even be somewhat merciful and magnanimous as, for example, when he accepts Themistocles at his court.[666] Similarly, none of the several anonymous tyrants, protagonists of the *Controversiae* may be likened to any of the Persian kings, Alexander or Hellenistic rulers. They are very different from any Persian court, albeit fictional, for they operate in an urban world (not in a palace) where tyrannicide is considered praiseworthy and is rewarded by the community.[667]

To conclude, this was a fluid period during which Alexander and the Persian kings were undergoing a development and a certain level of amplification of the faults of the Persian Kings can be detected. Because the foreign exempla of Alexander and the Persian Kings are used as examples of similar negative role models, as a result, they enter a convergent trajectory.[668] In retrospect, this is certainly a movement towards a development in the identification of the Persian King and Alexander as despots. However, the Persian king is not yet a downright tyrant. It is remarkable, indeed, that Xerxes is never called so or even *rex* by the elder Seneca or Valerius.[669] It is also of some relevance

[666] 5.3 ext. 3 *non debitam … misericordiam*, the story is repeated at 8.7 ext. 15 without implying Xerxes' magnanimity.
[667] See Tabacco 1985 on the tyrant in the *Controversiae* of Seneca senior.
[668] The general tendency to use foreign rulers, and the tyrant in particular, as negative role models, it has been suggested, may be explained as a symptom of dissidence (Bonner 1949: 42-43 and Dunkle 1971: 14). This hypothesis would elegantly explain how the Persian king and Alexander enter the roster of the tyrants and are identified with some of the features typical of the character (*libido, superbia*). If political discussions moved to the schools of rhetoric and the Roman Republic had changed into an autocracy, it appears quite understandable that this could have led to an increase in the popularity of the tyrant-theme. However, there is no clear evidence that this may be the case. For a summary of the problem, see Tabacco 1985: 8-9 and n19.
[669] If anything, he is barbarian and oriental rather than a *tyrannus* (Migliario 2007: 102-04). In Valerius Polycrates (6.9 ext. 5), Phalaris, Nicocreon and Hyeronimus (3.3 ext.2) are tyrants. They are all torturers.

that they cannot be read politically targeting specific individuals, in particular the ruler of the Roman empire. Before long, the vices of these two champions of excess and despotism would increase exponentially and overlap, cruelty would become a prominent discriminant of their actions and they would find correspondence in very identifiable contemporary characters.

3. Seneca the Younger. Persian kings, emperors, tyranny.

In Seneca the Younger (hereafter Seneca) the tendencies noted above are exacerbated. In his works, the Persian king acquires very defined moral features. He is greedy, arrogant, unrestrained and, above all, cruel. He is a tyrant; there is no room for nuances. The focus also shifts from general (e.g. the Persian King as a case study of excess – anybody who behaves excessively can be compared to Xerxes) to specific (the Persian King as a case study of royal excess – only a king can be as excessive as Xerxes). This evolution goes in parallel with the evolution of the character of Alexander the Great. In Seneca the despots of the past become so typified (and detached from the historical character) that they seem to be almost interchangeable. At the same time, this process cannot be disentangled from the elaboration of another example of archetypical despot: Gaius. By taking traditional anecdotes, re-elaborating and placing them next to new ones that have the son of Germanicus as protagonist, Seneca forges a lasting connection between the Persian kings, Alexander and the quintessential Roman tyrant-emperor.

Description of the Persian king in Seneca. The construction of a tyrant.

Seneca does not build a coherent image of the Persian King and constructing one does not seem to be of interest to him. On the most basic level, he simply repeats worn out clichés. As in *Epistula* 119 where Persian wealth is contrasted with Alexander's poverty.[670] Or in *de Constantia Sapientis*, where Xerxes' act of defiance towards the gods is interpreted as a symptom of idiocy.[671]

Sometimes, Persian stories appear in works in which the philosopher focusses on moral issues such as the volatility of pleasure and the dissatisfaction of 'those whom Fortune has goaded on by rich gifts' and could not refrain from desiring more conquests.[672] In the *de Brevitate Vitae* the episode of the weeping of Xerxes at the sight of his army is recalled in order to argue that, for the powerful, unwise man (Xerxes), happiness (*felicitas*) is always a step removed and pleasure (*voluptas*) brings about anxiety and fear.[673] The shift of focus towards a moral interpretation appears stark when this episode is compared to Valerius, who simply criticises the Persian king for his limited intelligence and desire of life.[674] Seneca, by contrast, offers a twofold criticism. On the one hand there is Xerxes' volatility made manifest by the misalignment between his own passions. Because Xerxes is a pursuer of *voluptas* (pleasure), his unhappiness in front of

[670] *Ep.* 119.7.

[671] 4.2 *stolidus ille rex* ('that stupid king'). Seneca interprets the obscuring of the sun (arrows) and the chaining of the Hellespont as acts of defiance towards the gods – but, Seneca says, the gods, like a sage, are not touched by these pathetic efforts of an overbearing (*superbe*) man.

[672] *Ben.* 7.3.1 *omnium, quos fortuna irritavit implendo*.

[673] *Brev. Vit*. 17.2. Cf. Brev. Vit. 16.3: *nam si quando illos deseruerunt occupationes, in otio relicti aestuant nec quomodo id disponant aut extrahant sciunt* ('for, whenever their engrossments fail them, they are restless because they are left with nothing to do, and they do not know how to dispose of their leisure or to drag out the time); and 17.1: *variis terroribus inquietae sunt* ('uneasy and disquieted by alarms of various sorts). Compare with *ep.* 75.17 and, even more significant, *ep.* 71.37. The full passage is quoted below. Cf. Hdt. 7.45-46. (Translation of Seneca's moral works: Basore, Loeb, Epistulae: Gummere, Loeb, Tragedies: Fitch, Loeb, unless otherwise specified)

[674] 9.13 ext.1 *opum magnitudine quam altiore animi sensu felicior* ('more fortunate in the magnitude of his power than in any depth of understanding').

something that should have excited him emphasises his erratic behaviour. On the other hand, there is Xerxes' ineptitude as ruler. In fact, the regret Xerxes experiences at the thought that the young men he sees are destined to be dead in a hundred years lacks any true compassion precisely because he is taking them to a war where many will soon be killed. It is not just lack of empathy or mercy. Since a good ruler should care for his subjects, his fatuous concern becomes evidence of his inadequacy. Thus, in this instance, Xerxes' sadness is not a symptom of the brevity of human life and precariousness of fortune.[675] Nor is it caused by the egoistic perception that his life and power could come to an end (Valerius' point). The point is that power without wisdom brings dissatisfaction which, in turn, generates excessive ambition; the more powerful the man, the closer he can get to the limit where his behaviour reaches a point in which he becomes criminal.[676] This is a consideration that Seneca repeats several times in various places. He applies it to Xerxes in *de Brevitate Vitae*, to Cyrus, Cambyses and 'the royal line of Persia' in *de Beneficiis*.[677] But the prototype of this disease is Alexander.

The Macedonian is one of those who 'were conquered by their own greed'.[678] He is driven by a mad desire to lay waste foreign lands that sends him to unknown places.[679] He is cruel and fiery, 'passes beyond the Ocean and the Sun … he threatens violence to Nature herself'.[680] In a passage in *de Beneficiis* Seneca contends that the real pleasure is

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[675] Hdt. 7.46.2.
[676] There is in Seneca condemnation of *taedium duvitiarum* (*Ben.* 1.10.13 also *Tranq.* 2.6) and *fastidium* (nausea; *Constant.* 18.2; *Ep.* 122.18, *Tranq.* 2.5). This not to suggest an 'existentialist' *ante litteram* position. The reason why happiness 'would not last', for Seneca, is intrinsic to the nature of *voluptas*. If one pursues pleasure, there cannot be happiness. (For an overview of the idea of happiness in existentialism cf. Camus A. *The Myth of Sisyphus*)
[677] *Ben*. 7.3.1. The desire of more conquests *inexpletible est* ('cannot be satisfied').
[678] *cupiditate vincti sunt; Ep.* 94.61.
[679] These individuals (he also mentions Pompey, Caesar and Marius) are greedy for power and the cause of great disasters to other men. They bring about havoc to many and 'were disturbing the world' (Loeb) *Isti cum omnia concuterent* (*concuto* = disturb but also shake, shatter).
[680] 91.63: *it tamen ultra oceanum solemque, … ipsi naturae vim parat*. Cf. also *ep.* 94.62.

not that of the body or that which derives from ambition but the one that comes from being content with themselves and free from disturbances.[681] In order to exemplify that great gains produce more desire, he mentions Alexander who – a familiar image – on the shore of the Indian Ocean, desires what he lacks even though he has conquered, exploited and oppressed many lands.[682] The idea frequently returns with small variations.[683] The most relevant example is in the 113th *Letter to Lucilus*, where Seneca explains the psychological dynamic of Alexander's behaviour. It is his unquenchable desire of power and self-aggrandisement that leads him to lose his self-control (113.30) and to behave insolently towards his friends (113.29). This condition of the soul (*cupiditas*) is (again) exemplified by the desire to cross the natural limit.[684]

The analogies between Alexander and the Persian king are ubiquitous; much more frequent and significant than in any other previous author, and span from the morality to the psychology of the characters. They both conduct themselves without moderation and their reverses of fortune demonstrate that no good comes from excess. They are both so driven by *cupido* and ambition that, in their pursuance for more (conquests, glory, riches), threaten the limits that nature and the gods have set for humans.[685] There are similarities also in their motivations. As it happens to Cambyses in *de Ira*, it is dissatisfaction and the pride that comes with excessive power and fortune that prompts

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[681] *Ben.* 7.2.3-3.1.

[682] This rhetorical theme of the violation of the Ocean as a symbol of excessive (immoral) boldness returns at *QNat.* 5.18.5-14 where Seneca proffers a long tirade against the misuse of the winds and navigation.

[683] Lassandro (1984) explores the 26 times Alexander is mentioned across Seneca's corpus and notes that only three do not include condemnation of the behaviour of the Macedonian. The mechanism whereby Alexander becomes a tout court negative example is explained by Roller 2001: 88-95.

[684] *Ep.* 113.3, the Ocean *qui ius dominandi trans maria cupiunt permittere*; but there are situations where the limit is human (e.g. *Ben.* 1.13.1-3).

[685] *Ben.* 7.2.3-3.1, *QNat.* 5.18.10*, Ep.* 94.61. Echoes appear in Juv. *Sat.* 10.173-187.

Alexander to behave insolently towards his friends.[686] In addition to that, there are several lexical similarities. For the whole semantic spectrum of madness, ferocity and excess is applied to both the Macedonian and to the Persian rulers.[687] They are almost interchangeable; in their *cupiditas* despots tend to resemble each other.[688]

The most impressive series of anecdotes with the Persian king as protagonist is in a long passage from *De Ira*.[689] Here Seneca produces seven exempla of Persian excessive behaviour and pointless brutality separated by some anecdotes that have non-barbarian protagonists. It is a sequence of cruelties of appalling bloodiness that, even if partially justified by the context and precedents, is remarkable for the disproportion between the offence and the reaction and for the vacuity of the motivations. The first is the story of Cambyses who, advised by Praexaspes, a noble Persian and a friend, to reduce his drinking, demonstrates his tolerance for alcohol by getting drunk and shooting Praexaspes' son through the heart. Then he has the boy's chest open to demonstrate that he really had centred the target.[690] Protagonist of the second episode is Astyages, the king of the Medes, who cruelly exacts revenge on one of his closest advisors, Harpagus,

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[686] *Ep.* 113.29 - *Ira* 3.14.1 (see infra); Praexaspes is one of the dearest friends of the king (*Ira* 3.14.1).
[687] *tumor, tumidus, tumens*, (Alexander: *Ben.* 5.6.1 and 2.16.2; Xerxes: *Ben.* 6.31.1). *Furor*, *vesanus*, *feritas, crudelitas, felix temeritas, vanitas, ebrietas*, *cupiditas* are associated to Alexander (Lassandro (1984: 156-57) supplies a handy list with references). On the Persian side, Cambyses is 'bloodthirsty' (*cruentus*: *de Ira* 3.14.4), 'enraging' (*fremebat*: *de Ira* 3.20.2), Darius is 'cruel' (*crudelis*: *de Ira* 3.16.4), Persian Kings have 'fierceness' (*feritas*: *de Ira* 3.17), 'ferocity' (*saevitia*: *Ira* 3.18.1), are called 'executioner' (*carnifex: Ira* 3.15.3).
[688] The event that ignites Alexander's fury (which would then lead him to kill his friend) originates from the opposition of Clitus to adopt Persian practices because he was 'reluctant to transform himself from a Macedonian and a free man into a Persian slave' (*pigre ex Macedone et libero in Persicam servitute transeuntem*). The obvious implication is that Alexander had changed from a Macedonian into a Persian despot; the cruelty of Alexander comes with his 'Persianization' (cf. Just. 12.3.8-12, Diod. 17.77.4-5, Curt. 6.6.1-11 and 6.6.6).
[689] 3.3.2-3. Seneca says that *ira* turns a man into a monster because it urges him to throw himself against friends and other men in general (*quanto monstri sit homo in hominem furens 3*.3.2). *De Ira* was probably written in the exile years and published after 41 CE. On date Griffin 1976: 396, Monteleone, 2014: 127.
[690] 3.14.1-6.

by killing his only son and feeding him to Harpagus during a banquet.[691] Then there is Darius I, who, about to leave to wage war against the Scythians, in a fit of rage kills the three sons of a nobleman (Oeobazus) who had asked him to let one of them go home with him.[692] Next comes Xerxes, who has one of the sons of the noble Lydian Pythius, who asked for his release from service, ripped in two halves before his army marches through them.[693] At this point Seneca adds a brief digression on non-barbarian brutal characters. He mentions Alexander who transfixes his friend Clitus with a spear during a banquet. Sulla and his henchman Catilina, who literally dismember Marius Gratidanus. And Gaius, who has *consulares*, senators and equites tortured and killed in a variety of ways on account of his inclination (*animi gratia*) and with such pleasure (*voluptas*) that sometimes he orders executions even at the light of torches to satisfy his impatience.[694] Eventually, he returns to Persian stories with an unnamed Persian king who has the noses of the inhabitants of an entire town cut off. Then it is Cambyses' turn again. Furious (*fremebat*) with the Ethiopians he sets off for an expedition without properly planning it and drives his men to starvation. His total lack of humanity reaches its culmination when, while his soldiers turned to cannibalism, he eats rare birds which had been kept for his lunches.[695] Finally, there is Cyrus who shows his anger against a river when his horse drowns in it.[696]

The succession of episodes, accumulation of details and the evident disproportionate nature of the royal actions not only amplify the brutality but also the

[691] 3.15.1-2.
[692] 3.16.3.
[693] 3.16.4
[694] 3.17.1-19.5.
[695] 3.20.2-4.
[696] 3.20.1-21.4. On Cyrus' episode cf. *Pan. Mess.* [Tib] 3.7.137-142.

connection of rage and cruelty with the Persians.[697] Where does this escalation of violence and cruelty come from? It is certainly difficult to blame the sources. If the primary source is Herodotus, as it seems likely, the emphasis on cruelty cannot come from him because he did not depict the Persians as brutish, violent thugs [see Introduction], unless we admit Seneca misread the original.[698] Very much the opposite. Take the episode of Pythius (7.38-39) for example. Herodotus does not linger on cruelty at all, not even incidentally.[699] The emphasis is on the asymmetrical relationship between ruler and subject rather than on the violence of the punishment. Even the famous story of the flogging of the Hellespont, a passage that occurs right before the episode of Pythius and presents Xerxes as prey to a fit of uncontrolled rage, significantly, does not produce any cruel reaction. Herodotus' focus is all on impiety. For Herodotus it is not rage but excessive unrestrained power and hubris that produce the various types of transgressions, regardless of whether they are geographical (bridges), physical (mutilations, flogging) and psychological (madness); cruelty may come as a by-product, or may not.[700] A similar set of considerations can be applied to other incidents such as the one that has Darius and Oebazus as protagonists.[701] I am not contending here that the depiction of Xerxes and other Persian kings is positive or negative in Herodotus. What

[697] The cruelty of the Persian kings proceeds from rage (*quid autem ira crudelius est?* (1.5)). Although it is not openly stated if Cambyses acts in a fit of rage, anger lies behind the behaviour of Astiages, who reacts to an offence and Seneca has more than once made clear that rage is a response to an offence (cf. 2.21, 2.26, 3.8, 3.9, etc.). There is no doubt about the other two episodes. Darius and Xerxes 'indulged their anger as though it were a privilege of royalty' (16.3: *Atqui plerique sic iram quasi insigne regium exercuerunt, sicut Dareus* … and then goes on *At quanto Xerses facilior!* 'Yet many kings have indulged their anger as though it were a privilege of royalty, like Darius … How much more good-natured was Xerxes!'). Cruelty comes from anger, *Ira* 2.5.3.

[698] Setaioli (1981) argues for a Herodotean derivation without intermediaries. Contra, Rosivach 1984: 15n12.

[699] See Rollinger 2000: 65-84.

[700] Hartog (1988) 2009: 330-40.

[701] Hdt. 4.84.1-2. On the episodes see Evans 1991: 56-67.

I mean is that, regardless of whether the historian is critical or not he does not give such prominence to cruelty. It should also be noted that Herodotus makes distinctions (not all the Persian kings are cruel). Indeed, Persian cruelty, at the level presented in *de Ira* is not a prominent feature in any Greek writer. Even in Ctesias' account, where there are some gruesome episodes, these are not the rule and usually are carried out by women.[702] More importantly, we do not have such a convergence on brutality in Roman tradition. From (supposedly) Ennius to Seneca the Elder there is hardly any explicit mention of Persian cruelty and rage. Nobody, and surely no Latin writers before him, had put Persian cruelty in the spotlight in such categorical terms. It is very probable that the ultimate responsibility for this unprecedented level of brutality rests with Seneca.

The rage and cruelty of the ruler occupies the centre stage. However, no less important is the subject, the counterpart of the despot, who is in a very unpleasant situation. He must deal with an all-powerful overlord whose behaviour is unpredictable because unfettered either by the law (because he is above the law) or by wisdom. Virtually deprived of any form of protection from the whims of the master, terrified and lacking any parameters of behaviour, the subject can only conform to total subordination and servility to the point of accepting any atrocities (including the killing of a son) without flinching.[703] Thus, Praexaspes is straightforwardly defined as in *condicione mancipium* (that is, 'a slave'). Of Harpagus Seneca says:

[702] Ctesias *Persica*: Stronk F14 (39), F15 (55-56). Discussion of the role of Persian women with special reference to Parysatis and the work of Ctesias in Brosius 1996: 109-19.
[703] 3.13.7.

> *Necessaria ista est doloris refrenatio, utique hoc sortitis uitae genus et ad regiam adhibitis mensam … Non consolabimur tam triste ergastulum, non adhortabimur ferre imperia carnificum: ostendemus in omni seruitute apertam libertati uiam.*
>
> *De Ira* 3.15.3

> This way [Harpagus' way, that is by dissimulation induced by fear] of curbing anger is necessary, at least for those who have chosen this sort of life and who are admitted to dine at a king's table; … Let us not console so sorry a crew, or encourage them to submit to the orders of their butchers; let us point out that however slavish a man's condition [*seruitute*] may be, there is always a path to liberty open to him, unless his mind be diseased.

His passive attitude, the control he can exert over rage, his necessary submission that equates to the imprisonment of the soul (*ergastulum*) and is the opposite of freedom (in this case, that which is granted by suicide) qualify Harpagus as a slave.[704] If we were in Greece in the fourth century BCE there would probably have been an ethnological explanation of this. Since the Persians are uneducated, tyrannical attitudes, cruelty (of the ruler) and servility (of the subjects) are innate in them. But we are at Rome in the first century CE, not in Plato's Athens (see introduction); and Seneca is well aware of the difference, thus his interpretation becomes subtler and more 'Roman'.[705]

[704] On suicide as a path towards freedom see *ep.* 70.15 and *ep.* 77. Roller (2001: 233-64) discusses the models master / slave and father / son as paradigms for ruling power in the Republic and during the Julio-Claudian period. On the lexical binary master – slave in these passages, see also Roller 2001: 216-18.
[705] 3.17.1.

Seneca explains that there is a strong connection between fear and rage. Unrestrained anger comes with uncheckered cruelty and together they produce fear, which is one of the means that can be used to impose one's supremacy.[706] It follows that anger and cruelty are both useful tools to keep power.[707] Ruling through fear, however, means entering a system that leads to tyranny because it generates hatred and transforms subjects into slaves.[708] Deranged kings such as Cambyses, Astiages – but also, as we will see, Atreus and Gaius – use fear to keep their power and this qualifies them as tyrants, while their subjects are unequivocally ranked among the slaves. Thus, ultimately, the link between rage and tyranny is fear, it is through fear that a free man is made into a slave and a king into a tyrant and a monster.[709] Although fear can be useful in that, to some extent, it can control the rage of a slave, it can also stimulate the rage of a powerful man and lead to a spiral of anger, fear and ferocity that cannot be to the advantage of anyone.[710] Neither to the weak, because it makes him servile without guaranteeing his safety, nor to the powerful, because it makes him an object of hatred and this leads to conspiracy. The reliance of the ruler on cruelty and fear to uphold his power has further social ramifications. It affects the relationship between the guest and the host and the mechanism that governs the exchange of benefits. It is not hard to predict what the Romans would think of this given that they held freedom in such esteem and were so recalcitrant to being subjugated.[711] In a society based on reciprocity, reciprocating a

[706] 'Anger is in itself hideous and by no means to be feared; yet it is feared by many' (*Ira* 2.11). Fear destroys man's freedom *ep*. 80.5-6, *ep.* 85.28 and enslaves man *ep*. 47.17, *ep.* 66.16.
[707] See the acute analysis of fear as *instrumentum imperium* in La Penna 1972: 357-62.
[708] Fear generates hatred, *Ira* 1.20. Fear can repress hatred, *Clem.* 1.12.3. Fear leads to revolt, *Ira* 3.16.2.
[709] Since hatred and fear (and brutality) are monstrosities (*Ira* 1.20) (cf. *Clem.* 1.17.1-9).
[710] *Ira* 2.11.
[711] The condition of subordination carries always an idea of imposition and being subordinate did not appeal much to the members of the Roman elite. Losing one's *libertas* is often considered worse than death (especially by Seneca, cf. *Ben*. 1.11.4); so engrained is this concept in Roman's mentality that even

friendly piece of advice with torture, or a request for a benefit with brutality, undermines the authority of the ruler and brings about an escalation of hostile responses.[712] A good Roman under a despot can only become a conspirator or a suicide.

It could therefore be said that the section of the *de Ira* discussed above illustrates with practical examples drawn from Persian stories, a series of related concepts. Along with the practical demonstration of how fear can limit rage, there is a representation of the Persian king as tyrant and an exploration of the mechanisms that shape his relationship with the subject. All this is framed as an enquiry into the origins and consequences of rage and their relation to absolute power.

In terms of political philosophy, nothing of the above is particularly innovative. Many of the points touched upon had already been discussed at length by Greek authors. This is particularly true especially for how the relationship between fear and power works to generate tyrannies.[713] The dangers of a courtier under a despotic king are similarly conventional.[714] The degenerative effect that excessive fortune may have on an unwise ruler is another trite story. So are the considerations of the difficulty for a powerful man to maintain a balanced mind. What is unprecedented is the coherent elaboration (the first in Latin literature) of the Persian king's image into that of a tyrant.

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the subordination that patronage entailed was often accepted *obtorto collo* (cf. Cic. *Off.* 2.69 with Brunt 1988: 395).

[712] Roller (2001: 157-64) explores the Persian episodes from *Ira* from the point of view of the exchange of gifts and of the role and perils of free speech in the context of a royal banquet.

[713] Analysis of tyranny has a long story so does how the relationship between fear and power works to generate tyrannies. Some relevant passages. *On Airs, Waters, Places* 16.23, Thuc. 1.23, 1.75.3, 1.76.2, 2.63.2, 5.89 (with Macleod 1974: 390-92, de Ste. Croix 1972: 12, de Romilly 1963: 124-5 and 294-5). Xenophon *Symp.* 4.29-32 and *Hiero*. 7.6 and 7.8. Aristotle *Pol.* 1313b-1315b. Cic. *Att.* 7.12.2, Valerius Maximus 9.2 introduction and *passim*. In this sense Seneca sits at the end of a long process of evolution of which he represents the logical outcome.

[714] The relationship king – adviser is matter of great interest to Herodotus (Lattimore 1939) but is a motive that goes back to Homer (e.g.: Polydamas *Il.* 12.195-250).

One only needs to read the definition of the difference between a king and a tyrant in *de Clementia*.[715] In agreement with the Stoic concept of government and monarchy, Seneca explains that a *iustus rex* can only be a wise man who cares about his subjects as a father, is loved by them in return, does not need to be feared and has his authority willingly recognized by his subjects. The tyrant, by contrast, is ferocious, bloodthirsty and harsh, he delights in brutality, has no mercy, uses terror to stop hatred, acts contradictorily and whimsically. He is hated by the people, he does not trust the loyalty of friends, does not receive the devotion of children. Because he is a prisoner of his cruelty and desire for power he fears and longs for death at the same time.[716] It is self-evident that this is precisely the portrait of the angry rulers of *de Ira*. The Persian King is at the centre of a world where rulers rule through fear, cruelty, hatred and the subjects obey because they are deprived of any liberty, cowed by fear and resentful. It is even possible to empirically classify the protagonists of this taxonomy of autocratic tendencies. On the positive side, there is Augustus who is almost always the object of praise.[717] On the opposite end of the spectrum, there are Julius Caesar and Pompey, two ambitious individuals in competition for primacy and 'obsessed' with absolute power, two ambiguous characters, whose faults outdo the merits, especially if read in contrast

[715] 1.11.4-1.13.14. On Seneca, political philosophy and the *principate,* see Griffin 1976: 202-21 and Roller 2001: 64-66 and 129 who sees the ruler as a political problem rooted in ethical philosophy. On Seneca's relationship with monarchy, see *ep.* 14 and *Ben.* 2.20.1-2 (Seneca accepts monarchy as inevitable). On Seneca and the Stoic concept of kingship see, for example, *Clem.* 1.3.5-4.3 and *Ben*. 2.20.2 with Griffin 1974: 202-08. On king (*rex* and *regnum*) as a neuter word as opposed to *tyrannus*, which is always negative see Codoñer 2003: 56-88.
[716] 1.11.4-1.13.14. Cf. also *ep.* 114.24.
[717] On Augustus see *Clem.* 1.9-11; *Cons. Polyb.* 15.3, *Ira* 3.23.4, 3.40, *Ben.* 2.25.1 and 3.27; *Ben.* 1.15.5, 2.27.2, 3.27.4.

with Cato who is always an example of a Stoic sage.[718] There is obviously Sulla.[719] And then there are Alexander and the Persians. Powerful, excessive, dissatisfied, ambitious kings, but also brutally cruel and calamitous. In one word they are a paradigm of unwise rulers and tyrants.

But what is the purpose of this? Why does Seneca recycle Persian anecdotes? Surely, he was not interested in the Persians per se. Nor was he interested in reviving the standard repertoire of declamation. He had, however, a bad ruler to set against these models: the emperor Gaius.

Gaius in the treatises.

That Gaius is a bad emperor for Seneca it is something that hardly needs to be mentioned. He appears seventeen times in the prose works, never he is associated to a positive or neutral comment.[720]

[718] Caesar and Pompey see *Ep*. 94.65 and *Consolatio ad Marcia* 14.3 and Griffin 1976: 183-94. On Caesar and absolute power *Ben.* 5.16.5. For an example of positive characterization of Caesar see *Ira* 3.30.4. On Augustus in *de Clementia,* see Braund 2009: 61-64. It is hardly necessary to mention that the majority of these anecdotes derive from rhetorical exercises or proverbs and many examples are taken from the standard repertoire of declamation (Setaioli 1981: 382-83). On Gaius and exempla Schrömbreg 1988. Mayer 2008: 304-05 and Roller 2001: 88-108 discuss the relationship with tradition and innovation in Seneca's use of exempla.
[719] *Clem.* 1.22.2.
[720] See table 1. On Gaius as a monster, see Griffin 1976: 213.

Table 1.

Gaius as bad emperor

		Associated with a Persian King	*Defined as cruel*
1.	*De Beneficiis* 2.12.1-2	*X*	
2.	*De Beneficiis* 2.21.5		
3.	*De Beneficiis* 4.31.2		
4.	*De Beneficiis* 7.11.1	*X*	
5.	*De Constantia Sapientis* 18.1-5		
6.	*De Ira* 1.20.8		
7.	*De Ira* 2.33.3-6	*X*	*X*
8.	*De Ira* 3.18.3-19	*X*	*X*
9.	*De Ira* 3.21.5	*X*	
10.	*De Tranquillitate Animi* 11.10		*X*
11.	*De Tranquillitate Animi* 14.9		*X*
12.	*De Brevitate Vitae* 18.5-6	*X*	*X*
13.	*De Brevitate Vitae* 23.3.		*X*
14.	*Ad Polybium de Consolatione* 13.4		*X*
15.	*Ad Helviam de Consolatione* 10		*X*
16.	*Ad Polybium de Consolatione* 11.17.3-6		*X*
17.	*Naturales Quaestiones* 4 praef. 17		*X*
Note: Out of 17 instances in which Gaius is named six times he is associated with a Persian king. Eight times he is defined as cruel. Three times he is cruel and associated with Persian kings, on one occasion with no less than five.			

Even in the tragedies it is not difficult to perceive his shadow behind the figures of Atreus, Agamemnon and Oedipus. In the *Oedipus*, where the protagonist morphs from a good king to a tyrant, at least twice allusions to the emperors map unambiguously on Gaius.[721] In the *Thyestes*, which is much richer in allusions to the Roman rulers but more ambiguous as to what emperor Seneca refers to, the remarks, in the third act, about the man who has the power to crown princeps and stop with a nod wars among the Parthians, the Indians, the Medes and the Dahae and the description of the sumptuous palace may very well refer to Gaius. [722]

There is a close, almost symbiotic, relationship between Gaius and the Persian kings, not only in *de Ira*. The most obvious is the recurring juxtaposition of Gaius' acts with episodes of Persian history. Some details seem to have been placed there only to suggest parallels. For example, the actions of Cambyses at the banquet may recall to the mind of the reader the passages in *de Ira* and *de Constantia Sapientis*, where Gaius is the protagonist of banquets and abuses.[723] The use of such a specific word as *carnifex* to

[721] To highlight the tyrannical tendencies of the king of Thebes, Seneca reworks two quotes that Gaius was very fond of. One is Atreus' famous sentence from Accius' lost play: *oderint, dum metuant* (*Oed.* 243 'let them hate provided that they fear'; cf. Accius *Atreus* fr. 3 in Boyle 2006: 129; on Gaius using it, see Suet. *Gaius* 30.1). The other is *qui nimium timet / regnare nescit: regna custodit metus* (*Oed.* 703-704; 'One unduly afraid of being hated is incapable of ruling; a throne is safeguarded by fear.'). Cf. Malaspina 2014: 280-81.

[722] King: 599-606. Palace: 455-469. Frustratingly, Seneca does not give us enough material to identify to which emperor he is alluding, therefore, any deduction, ultimately, hinges on historical considerations and the dating of the tragedies. The emperor may be Claudius (Herzog 1928: 77), Nero (Tarrant 1985: 48, but he notes that the allusions fit both Gaius and Nero). For Nisbet (2008) he must be an Oriental king, possibly Vologaeses. Historical and stylistic considerations suggest a period of composition of the *Thyestes* under Nero. But any date between 57 and 63 is plausible and the tragedy may well have been written under Nero with Gaius in mind (and several small details seem to support this possibility). On the dating of the tragedies Fantham 1982: 9-14, Fitch 1981, Nisbet 2008, Tarrant 1985: 10-13, a shorter overview of the dating problem Malaspina 2014: 176-77. On Seneca's discourse of autocracy in the tragedies: Henry and Henry 2000: 68-74.

[723] *Ira* 2.33.3-6 - *Constant.* 18.2. The connection between *Ira* 2.33.3-6 (episode of Pastor) and 3.16. will be explored later.

define Cambyses bloodthirstiness finds a significant correspondence in *de Beneficiis* where it is applied to Gaius.[724] The suggestion that a bad king as Astiages could be killed by his subjects points to a comparison with the end of Gaius.[725] So do the considerations on how a king who has *fortuna,* little wisdom and *licentia* can lose his common sense and greatly harm his subjects and his land (he can be offended by obviously ridiculous events: a river!).[726] All this may seem tenuous. There are, however, instances where the thread is much more evident. For example, the considerations on the migration of cruelty from the barbarian to the Romans are very significant. In *de Ira,* to mark the transition from Persian stories to Alexander and the Roman examples, Seneca states that cruelty and other vices were transferred to the Roman world from the outside.[727] After mentioning merely one episode from Republican times (the killing of Marius Gratidanus) he immediately moves to more recent times to present the perverted pleasure of the emperor in torturing and humiliating Roman senators.[728] He lingers on this topic for a few paragraphs then he says he would not add more examples of Gaius' tortures because it would be too long to enumerate all of them (*Adicere his longum est*), and returns to the Persian kings to describe how pernicious they had been to their population and even to their land. This argument, however, brings him immediately back to Gaius, who – out

[724] *Ira* 3.15.3 and *Ben.* 2.33.6. On *carnifex* as a 'label for rulers who lose their legitimacy … by engaging in violent hostile reciprocity with their aristocratic subjects', see Roller 2001: 164.
[725] *Ira* 3.14.14.
[726] *Licentia* and *fortuna* cf. *Ira* 3.11.3-4, on rage and the subjects cf. *Ira* 3.16 (*ira perniciosa est servientibus*; 'is harmful for all who serve'), on the assassination of Gaius and C. Cherea cf. *Constant.* 18.1-3. Ramondetti (1996) reads *de Ira* as a political and philosophical treatise, with the figure of the king at its core and Caligula and his autocratic behavior as its target.
[727] 3.18.1.
[728] Why investigating things of the past – he asks – when there is a recent example? (*Quia antiqua perscrutor? Modo C. Caesar …*). Note that Seneca uses *modo* (= recently) whenever he recalls Gaius, cf. *de Brev. Vitae* 18.5. *Ira* 3.18.3 (*non quaestionis sed animi causa* '[he tortured Roman senators,] not for the purpose of the inquest but because of the predisposition of his mind'). On Marius Gratidanus' death, which had already been used several times to exemplify the cruelty of Sulla, cf. Sall. *Hist.* 44M, with the considerations by La Penna in La Penna and Funari 2015: 160-61; also Val. Max. 9.2.1.

of spite – razed to the ground a villa only because his mother had been confined there. The continual oscillation between the past (when, for the first time, cruelty was combined with vast unchecked imperial power) and the most recent time, in conjunction with the considerations on the barbarian origins of cruelty and its transferral to the 'civilized world', shape the entire section as a short history of rage and cruelty from Cyrus' to Seneca's times, with Gaius as its climax. By selectively focussing on their content of gratuitous violence, Seneca constructs his examples in such a way that the relation between ferocity and vast power is emphasised and, at the same time, maps directly onto Gaius' biography.

Where Seneca is going with this juxtaposition of Persian king and Roman emperor is clear in two episodes, one from *de Ira* and the other from the *de Beneficiis*.[729] The first is the story of the *equis* Pastor who, invited to Gaius' table on the day his son had been executed for futile reasons, unhesitatingly accepts the hospitality least the emperor would take revenge over his other son.[730] As in the episodes of Harpagus and Praexaspes the attention is on the victim not on the killer, but with a caveat. Like Harpagus, Pastor does not flinch but, and here is the difference between him and his Persian counterpart, he refrains from flattering his master. His impassibility does not derive from fear but from the pietas he has for his other son, hence he is a true Roman in his demeanour.[731] This is a crucial distinction, because it explains the emphasis on the coupling Gaius/Persian kings. By being associated with a Persian king Gaius loses his *Romanitas*. The importance

[729] *De Ira* and the *de Beneficiis* are two political treatises that deal directly with Seneca's idea of good/bad kingship and are chronologically positioned at the beginning and end of Seneca's literary career. On *de Beneficiis* as later work (57-65), see Lentano 2014: 201 – on the dates of composition of the treatises see Griffin 1976: 395-411 and the recent contributions in Damschen, Heil and Waida 2014.
[730] *Ira* 2.33.3-6.
[731] Ramondetti 1996: 148-49.

of behaving as a Roman, implicit in the criticism of Gaius, is furthermore emphasised in the following lines. If Pastor is noble as the Trojan king Priamus – the author notes – Gaius is worse than Achilles, he is *impius* and, by implication, unworthy of his father Germanicus, his lineage, the *gens Iulia*, and, ultimately, of being a Roman.[732]

The second episode is narrated in *de Beneficiis*.[733] The story goes that, after sparing the life of the Roman senator Pompeius Pennus the emperor, 'offered' his left foot to him to kiss. At this sight, the senator prostrated – ignominy – before the emperor and kissed his slipper. This is, as Seneca notes, a great insult to an ex consul because it debases him and the institutions of the Republic alike.[734] And now, Seneca concludes, the customs of a free city are replaced with 'Persian servility'. Not only is Gaius a Persian-like tyrant, ruling over free men but he also tries to transform them into slaves. Could he be more un-Roman than that? In short, he is so base and wicked that he is put on the same

[732] 2.33.5. Ramondetti 1996: 250; cf. *Consolatio ad Polybium* 17.3-6: (speaking of Gaius) *Procul istud exemplum ab omni Romano sit viro* ('Far be it from every manly Roman to follow such an example').
[733] 2.12.1-2.
[734] Gaius did not adopt *proskynesis* as a standard ritual at his court. The act appears for the first time in this passage and it is the only episode including prostration mentioned by Seneca. Only two further instances of obeisance are reported by Dio (59.24 the senate, and 59.27.5 Vitellius) and Suetonius (17.1 the senate, 2.5 Vitellius). These three episodes have induced Baldson (1934: 166-68) to believe that obeisance had been adopted at the court of Gaius – he does not specify how regularly – and suggest that its origin may be related to the return of Vitellius from the East. The general – he believes – could have imported a foreign (Parthian) practice. This is hardly tenable. The homage of the senate happens in a temple, and Vitellius acts in front of the emperor in a context that allows assimilation to a divinity. The act of prostration, therefore, may well be intended as an act of worship in which the emperor acts in the capacity of a god. Perfectly acceptable behaviour. Furthermore, nowhere does Seneca hint to condemnation of this un-Roman practice. His concern is for Gaius' acting with disrespect towards the institutions and an important ex magistrate (he assists in a trial in slippers, *de capite consularis viri soccatus audiebat* (2.12.2)). The other (and greatest) of Seneca's preoccupations, is the humiliation of the senator and that this happens in a public context, in front of his peers. What Seneca presents is a whimsical emperor who simply relishes humiliating a *consularis*. Therefore, the episode of Pompeius Pennus may be interpreted as morally excessive precisely because it combines the public humiliation inflicted to the senator, the disregard of Gaius for the context in which he performs his request of obeisance and implies divinity of the emperor outside the religious realm. The adoption of *proskynesis* does not seem to be justified. This may well be another example of misunderstandings generated by Seneca involving Persian themes. On these passages, see Winterling 2011: 146-47 (on Pompeius Pennus) and 153-54 (on Vitellius); see also Roller 2001: 246.

level of a Persian king or even worse. After all the subjects of Cambyses are used to being slaves while the Romans are not.[735]

The creation of the image of Gaius in relation to the Persian Kings.

The privileged relationship between Persia and Gaius is not confined to the *de Ira*. All the vices and failures of the Persian king and its most famous representative, Xerxes, seen so far are all condensed in seven words in a passage already mentioned from the *de Brevitate Vitae*. The story compares a bridge of boats built by Gaius to the one made by Xerxes. After defining the Persian king as *Persarum rex insolentissimus* on account of the size of his army, he is defined as enraged (or mad), foreign, unfortunate and arrogant.[736] Cruelty is not spelled out but a careful reader knows from *de Ira* that rage brings about violence and cruelty.[737] I would like to analyse this episode from another perspective and look into the similarities between Gaius and Xerxes and what they mean for the development of the character of the Persian King.

Seneca alludes to Xerxes twice in two consequent paragraphs. First, at the end of a long discussion on the virtues of the Stoic sage. Seneca begins by noting that the wise man makes better use of his time because he is conscious of the present, past and future.

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[735] Ramondetti 1994: 251. Codoñer 2003: 72 notes that the word tyrant (*tyrannus*) is used by Seneca in association with only two Romans: Sulla (*Clem.* 1.12.2) and Gaius (indirectly, *de Brevitate Vitae* 18.5 and more explicitly, *Ben.* 2.21.5).

[736] The passage is quoted in full below. The Persian king is *furiosi, et externi et infeliciter superbi regis*. 'mad and foreign and misproud king' according to Loeb's translation. Mis-proud (for *infeliciter*) may be slightly misleading. *TLL* (VII/1 1365 c2) and *OLD* (895) suggest 'unfortunately, without good luck'. The lack of fortune may refer to the unsuccessfulness of his Greek invasion (and also to Gaius' bloody end, see Williams 2003: 242). However, the lemma *infelix*, not only indicates lack of fortune and madness (*OLD* 895 3b) but also the idea of 'unproductive' and 'calamitous' (*OLD* 895 2a) which fits very well with the context. Xerxes' pride brings no advantage but great pain to his subjects, so does the endeavour of Gaius.

[737] The link between rage and cruelty in relation to the king is explained at *Ira* 3.16; cfr. *Ira* 2.5.2-3. The argument is fully developed at *Ben*. 6.30.3-6. *De Brevitate Vitae* is thought to be contemporary to the *de Ira* 48-55 CE (50-55CE), cf. Scott Smith 2014: 161.

Then he points out that those who live longing for something do not enjoy the present either because they cannot wait to have what they want or because they are saddened at the idea that it will come to an end.[738] For this reason, kings cried over their power and were afraid of the end of their fortune. Here comes the example of Xerxes (unnamed by Seneca, but we know it is him from Herodotus), who, looking at his enormous army cries at the idea that all those young men will be dead in hundred years.[739]

> *Ipsae uoluptates eorum trepidae et uariis terroribus inquietae sunt subitque cum maxime exsultantis sollicita cogitatio: 'Haec quam diu?' Ab hoc adfectu reges suam flevere potentiam, nec illos magnitudo fortunae suae delectauit sed uenturus aliquando finis exterruit. Cum per magna camporum spatia porrigeret exercitum nec numerum eius 2 sed mensuram conprenderet Persarum rex insolentissimus, lacrimas profudit quod intra centum annos nemo ex tanta iuuentute superfuturus esset. At illis admoturus erat fatum ipse qui flebat perditurusque alios in mari, alios in terra, alios proelio, alios fuga, et intra exiguum tempus consumpturus* 3 *illos, quibus centesimum annum timebat. Quid, quod gaudia quoque eorum trepida sunt? Non enim solidis causis innituntur, sed eadem qua oriuntur uanitate turbantur.*
>
> *de Brevitate Vitae* 17.1-3

[738] 15.5- 17.1.
[739] Hdt. 7.45-46.

> The very pleasures of such men are uneasy and disquieted by alarms of various sorts, and at the very moment of rejoicing the anxious thought comes over them: "How long will these things last?" This feeling has led kings to weep over the power they possessed, and they have not so much delighted in the greatness of their fortune, as they have viewed with terror the end to which it must some time come. When the King of Persia, in all the insolence of his pride, spread his army over the vast plains and could not grasp its number but simply its measure, he shed copious tears because inside of a hundred years not a man of such a mighty army would be alive. But he who wept was to bring upon them their fate, was to give some to their doom on the sea, some on the land, some in battle, some in flight, and within a short time was to destroy all those for whose hundredth year he had such fear. And why is it that even their joys are uneasy from fear? Because they do not rest on stable causes,but are perturbed as groundlessly as they are born.

Seneca goes on to say that there are many reasons for anxiety and there is always a new occupation that requires our attention.[740] Then, he encourages his friend Paulinus to retire from active life and pursue a safer type of life and philosophical enquiry.[741] As an example of the problems that a man in his role had to deal with, he mentions the crisis of supplies under Gaius.

[740] 17.6 *Novae occupationes veteribus substituuntur, spes spem excitat, ambitionem ambitio*. ('New engrossments take the place of the old, hope leads to new hope, ambition to new ambition.')
[741] Paulinus, the addressee of the treatise, was *praefectus annonae*, the official who supervised the grain supply of Rome. He was, therefore, a man of importance.

Modo modo intra paucos illos dies, quibus C. Caesar perît – si quis inferis sensus est, hoc grauissime ferens,[742] *quod uidebat populo Romano superstiti septem aut octo certe dierum cibaria superesse – dum ille pontes nauibus iungit et uiribus imperi ludit, aderat ultimum malorum obsessis quoque, alimentorum egestas; exitio paene ac fame constitit et, quae famem sequitur, rerum omnium ruina furiosi et externi et infeliciter superbi regis imitatio.*

de Brevitate Vitae 18.5

Very recently within those few days after Gaius Caesar died—still grieving most deeply (if the dead have any feeling) because he knew that the Roman people were alive and had enough food left for at any rate seven or eight days— while he was building his bridges of boats and playing with the resources of the empire, we were threatened with the worst evil that can befall men even during a siege—the lack of provisions; his imitation of a mad and foreign and misproud king was very nearly at the cost of the city's destruction and famine and the general revolution that follows famine.

The passage summarizes well all the issues previously exposed. In addition to the characterization of the unwise ruler (see above), there is a representation of the functioning of the chain of desire and unhappiness that entraps the unwise, powerful

[742] The manuscripts have *gratissime* ('with great delight') but a correction has been suggested (*gravissime*). Grimal (1959: *ad loc.*) prefers the version of the codices. Reynolds (1977: *ad loc.*) favours the amendment. There is also a textual problem with *quod uidebat,* for alternatives, cf. Reynolds 1977: *ad loc.*).

ones.[743] Moreover, there is a juxtaposition of Xerxes and Gaius that creates a sort of reciprocal assimilation that makes them almost interchangeable and emphasises their tyrannical character. However, the most remarkable aspect of this passage is not in its content as in the fact that so keen was Seneca to obtain this effect of assimilation that he manipulated the facts.

Besides Seneca, the episode of the construction of a bridge of boats over the bay of Baiae is mentioned by Dio (59.17.1-11), Suetonius (Suet. *Gaius* 19.1-3) and Josephus (*AJ* 19.1). Of all, Dio is the most distant in time but the most detailed of all our sources. He says that in 39 CE (but there is uncertainty about the date) at Baiae Gaius built a bridge of boats over the sea, crossed over it on his horse followed by his army (as if attacking an enemy) wearing the breastplate of Alexander and then, the following day, crossed back on a chariot in what seems to be a sort of triumph. On the second day there was also a speech of the emperor and, while the entire bay was illuminated by fire, as if the night had been turned into day, a banquet was consumed on the bridge followed by some revelling during which several people were drowned. At the end of the exhibition, the emperor boasted that he had surpassed in glory Darius, Xerxes and Alexander. Suetonius agrees on many points but there are some discrepancies. In Dio Gaius claims that the endeavour demonstrated that he was superior to the Persian kings, Suetonius only says that 'many thought' (*plerosque existimasse*) that he had done this to emulate Xerxes (*aemulatione Xerxi*) and then adds two further hypotheses which he seems to consider

[743] The chain of desire and unhappiness works as follows. First desire (that produces impatience), fear of losing what one has (which brings about more fear and dissatisfaction), finally desire of more (thus, more dissatisfaction and ambition). The problem lies with the attitude of the subject towards time (16.1) and with the nature of the objects of this desire (17.3). Cf. *Ben.* 7.2.4 where the trainee in philosophy (*proficientem* 7.2.1) does not care about the future or about uncertain things, he does not covet anything and therefore is free from anxiety.

more solid. Suetonius does not mention the breastplate of Alexander when he describes the events at Baiae and it is not clear whether his description of the second procession should be intended as a triumph, but he elsewhere asserts that the emperor 'frequently wore the dress of a triumphing general, even before his campaign, and sometimes the breastplate of Alexander the Great'.[744] Josephus disagrees on motivations, he believed that Gaius had the bridge built out of boredom and desire to dominate the sea (*AJ* 19.4-5).

The incident has left several scholars perplexed and has given rise to a whole host of questions. Today there are as many interpretations of the episode at Baiae as there are scholars who have looked into it. [745] Given the inconsistency of the sources this is not surprising but on two points there is a broad agreement. First, the pageant has a military overtone. The presence of spoils and hostages and of the young Darius, son of Artabanus, King of Parthia frame the event as a procession celebrating a victory. Despite the presence of many elements that are reminiscent of a celebration of a Hellenistic ruler, some features such as the *corona civica*, the *insignae* have a definite Roman touch.[746] The exact weight of it may be the object of disagreement but a triumphal element was surely implicit in the spectacle.[747] Second, the whole show must be linked to the events

[744] *Gaius* 52 (Rolfe, Loeb) with Wardle 1994: 191-92.
[745] For Balsdon (1934: 58-95), the pageant could have been a show staged to impress the Parthian. Barrett (1989: 211-12) claims that there is no need to try to find a rational explanation at all costs and interprets the events as a demonstration of the emperor's power. For Kleijwegt (1994: 670) it 're-established the closest possible contacts with the military' especially the Praetorian Guard. Grimal (1978: 88) remarks on Gaius' connections with Antony and his 'orientalism'. Lana (1955-2010: 102-04) also mentions Antony and adds that Caligula wanted to establish an oriental monarchy. Palladino (2013) follows Lana and connects the orientalisation of the imperial role to Antony and Germanicus, both imitators of Alexander and advocates of oriental kingship. Ferrill (1991: 117), dismisses the whole episode of Baiae as antics of a madman. Nony (1986: 315) does not take a position.
[746] Suet. *Gaius* 19.1.
[747] Hurley (1993: 74) 'surrogate triumph'; Kleijwegt (1994) 'mock triumph'; Malloch (2001: 213-15) suggests an 'imagined triumph', no references to triumph for Wardle (1994: 192).

in the North. In fact, the temporal vicinity of the episode to the expedition to Germany (whether this was before or after) and the fact that this was the only event with a pretence of a military action during Gaius' *principate*, strongly indicate a relation.

Purpose

The divergence of modern (and ancient) interpretations is essentially in the date and in the reading of the motivation for this specific way to stage a demonstration of power. The problem of dating arises from the comparison between Dio and Seneca. The former says that the events took place in 39 CE, the latter places them a few months before the death of Gaius, which happened in 41 CE.[748] Once the possibility of Gaius' madness is dispelled some questions can be posed and assumptions may be made with respect to his purpose and motivations.[749] Why build a road over water? What was the point of this display and how should it be interpreted? If there is a triumphal element why was this show staged at Baiae and not at Rome?

For Balsdon the event was a celebration of a diplomatic victory as much as a pre-emptive triumph. He believes that Gaius was trying to impress the hostages just arrived from Parthia, to advertise the success of the negotiations with Volageses and, since he follows Dio placing the event in 39 CE, to promote his campaign to Germany. He gets around the problem of reconciling Seneca's dating with Dio by assuming that the former made a mistake.[750] How likely is a contemporary witness to make a mistake of this sort?

[748] Gaius died in January 41, therefore, the events at Baiae must have happened before the 31st August 40 since on that day Gaius re-entered Rome and received his *ovatio.*
[749] On why the possibility that Gaius was completely mad and there is nothing that we can infer from his actions should be discharged, see Winterling 2011: 1-7, 140-162, 187-94. Balsdon (1934: 212) and Barrett (1989: 176-180) also debunk Gaius' madness. Schrömbges (1988) suggests that a conclusion cannot be reached due to problems with the sources.
[750] Balsdon 1934: 70. On scarcity of supplies in 41 CE cf. Balsdon: 1934: 54 and 189-90.

Clearly, there cannot be a mistake about two major events such as the death of the emperor and a famine that occurred at the same time or immediately after; this is a combination of occurrences that can hardly have been bungled, let alone invented. Moreover, if the show was meant to be a display of power for the hostages and a premonition of the future successes in Germany, how could Seneca have forgotten, or assumed that his readers could forget, the campaign in the North that separated the two events, especially if it was as unsuccessful and anomalous as Suetonius and Dio depict it? The alternative explanation – which would make the confusion more understandable – is that there was another famine in 39 CE. Unfortunately, we have no record of such an event. The hypothesis of a mistake evidently is not fully satisfactory. In fact, recent readings have questioned Baldson's reconstruction. Malloch proposed a later date (40 CE) and related the episode to the events on the Channel.[751] He also placed a lot of emphasis on the *imitatio Alexandri* (possibly in connection with the family history of the princeps). Since his articles were published, an increasing number of scholars have found this hypothesis plausible.[752] Should we accept the date of 40 the events would make much more sense. The reason why Gaius staged the crossing of the sea would then either be a celebration of the events on the shore of the Ocean aiming at generating consensus or a demonstration that he *could* take an army across the sea and could have conquered Britain. It may also have been a message sent to the Germans and Britons alluding to a project of invasion of Britannia in the future. It could represent an alternative to a triumph inspired by the Hellenistic *pompè* with a message that the he was not interested in the Augustan compromise whereby an emperor works in tandem with the senate. This

[751] Malloch 2001a and 2001b.
[752] See Diosono 2013 and Winterling 2011: 126-31, both adopt the later date.

would explain the Campanian setting: he wanted to show that his power in Italy was strong and his independence from the decisions of senate to bestow honours. By imitating Alexander, the emperor displayed his domination over nature and identified himself with famous kings of the past, manifesting his status of absolute monarch and his political power. The triumphal element gave a Roman touch to a ceremony that may have looked too foreign otherwise, emphasised the power of the ruler and reinforced his claim to autonomy from the aristocracy.[753] If we opt for this possibility (based on Alois Winterling's reconstruction of the events), the overarching message is not difficult to figure out. Gaius wished to give a demonstration of his power over the Roman aristocracy and Seneca would be correct in placing the episode in 40 CE after the expedition to the North.

Even if this reconstruction saves Seneca's historical accuracy, it poses the problem of how to explain his (and Dio's) explicit reference to Xerxes. They do not have only the bridge, madness and excessive pride in common.[754] Their similarity is furthermore amplified through the consequences of their actions, which will prove nefarious to their subjects, and by the capriciousness of their wishes. In fact, this episode is placed right after the scene, mentioned before, in which Xerxes weeps about the fate of his men. The fact that Gaius uses the resources of the empire to 'amuse himself' (*ludet*) strips the episode of any symbolic value it could have had and presents the emperor's behaviour just as whimsical as the thoughts of Xerxes.[755] If all this happened in 40 CE, the explanation of the oriental factor as connected to the settlement with Volageses and the

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[753] Winterling 2011: 126-310.

[754] 18.5-6. On *furiosi* and *superbi* as adjectives qualifying both Xerxes and Caligula, see Williams 2003: 242.

[755] However, Gaius appears to be more reproachable: while Xerxes is superficial and inconsistent and his statement a truism, Gaius is simply wicked.

arrival of the hostages would not stand. Along with the display of power, the celebration of victories over enemies in the North (future or pretended) and a triumph (albeit rather unusual), the presence of Xerxes (and Darius) strikes a dissonant note: what does a mad, hubristic and, more importantly, defeated tyrant do here?

After ruling out anything like a pre-emptive celebration for a future campaign in the East against Parthia about which we have no evidence, there are three options left. First, we may accept the traditional reconstruction of the events (the episode of Baiae occurred in 39 CE and was a show put on to impress the Parthian hostages or to impress the Britons and the Germans) and find an alternative explanation to the easy, unexciting and overall rather unlikely possibility that Seneca made a chronological mistake. And indeed, there is one hypothesis that nicely explains the presence of Xerxes. Assuming that the events at Baiae really occurred in 39 Seneca may have purposely conflated the bridge episode and Gaius' death into one. By doing so he was able to accuse the princeps of having starved his subjects and could create an even more accurate parallel with Xerxes than the one already suggested by the bridge of boats. If this is true, this would mean that Seneca *wanted* to connect Xerxes and Gaius (not only through the bridge but also through their effect on their subjects) to such an extent that he was ready to manipulate the sequence of events to achieve this goal. Second option. It is also possible that for Caligula, Xerxes and Darius did not embody tyranny, baseness and madness (or hubris) but represented a line of absolute kings. Since kings like Antiochus IV of Commagene and other Hellenistic kings might have seemed a pale imitation of those rulers of the past, Gaius, to celebrate his power and show his independence from the Roman elite, went directly to the source: the Persians, the only ones who had a real

empire before the Romans.[756] If so, the combination of Alexandrian and Persian themes does not imply that Gaius was trying to *imitate* both. It seems more logical that he would be making a *comparison* between himself and them. Alexander had outdone the Persians and he (Gaius) outdid both.[757] To put it another way, Gaius train of thought would go as follows. If he could do what Xerxes and Darius tried to do and failed (cross the sea on a bridge, conquer and return in triumph) and what even Alexander did not accomplish completely (he managed to cross to India on a bridge, win and return but could not conquer the Ocean), then he would have more right to claim absolute power! This is not very different from Pompey's presentation of his victory as a victory over the memory of Alexander and Persia or from the Augustan claim that the entire history of Greece and the East converged onto Rome, the forum and the imperial family.[758] But, when compared to the cases of Augustus and Pompey, Seneca's emphasis on the imitation of Xerxes, shifts the focus enough to completely change the meaning of the episode from conquest of the world to becoming Xerxes. Finally, a third possibility is that Xerxes did not figure in the story at all. Malloch suggests that Seneca, who does not specify what mad king Gaius was imitating, was not alluding to Xerxes but to Alexander.

None of the above possibilities can be proved correct (or wrong). It is even conceivable that Gaius had elected Xerxes as his model.[759] However, would it be possible that Seneca be directly responsible for elaborating a negative image of Gaius through the

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[756] This is Winterling's reading.
[757] There is a similar comparison between Julian and Xerxes in Ammianus 23.3.9.
[758] On the cluster of symbols in the episode of Baiae and how they could be read as a 'una rappresentazione ideata a tavolino, ispirata alle gesta dei grandi del passato, ma presentata in un modo del tutto nuovo … per mostrare il suo dominio sullo spazio e sul tempo, da cui deve scaturire di conseguenza il suo potere politico', see Diosono 2013: 163.
[759] In which case one may be entitled to wonder if the possibility of being associated with the Persian kings did not deter Caligula from staging his performance could suggest that the Persian king had not yet become a univocal symbol of madness, cruelty, and, above all, defeated tyranny.

similarity with Xerxes? Removing Xerxes from the picture completely is problematic. It is certain that not every mention of a bridge must imply Xerxes, however, the juxtaposition of this passage with the episode of the weeping is too close and evocative to allow for a coincidence. Thus, we are left with two options which present both a degree of distortion in order to create association between Gaius and Xerxes. After all, it is a well-known fact that after his death there was a process of demonization of Gaius. And certainly, Seneca had his own personal reasons for regretting the memory of the emperor. There are at least two instances in which Seneca contributed to his slanderous posthumous reputation. The first, is his supposed aspirations for divine status. Winterling has convincingly argued that this might be a Suetonian misrepresentation of a passage from *de Ira*.[760] The second, is the elaboration of the image of the mad emperor.[761] This idea is consistently developed, for the first time, by Suetonius but there is a good possibility that he was inspired by Seneca who frequently defines the emperor as *insanus* and *furiosus.* For Seneca, *insania* is a wrong relationship between the subject and the surrounding reality and belongs to the irrational component of humanity, the faculty that generates error and wrong needs, in other words, vices. As such, it often comes in conjunction with *ira*.[762] *Furor* is a concept semantically slightly more complex but still predominantly permeated by moral connotations and, even when it may imply mental illness, it seems to be a consequence of *ira.*[763] Gaius' *insania* has also a political side for Seneca, who does not present him as mentally impaired but as an individual with some moral faults that

[760] Winterling 2011: 147-62.
[761] He may also have altered the story of how he survived through the years of Gaius' reign (Balsdon 1934: 56).
[762] *Ep.* 18.14 *immodica ira gignit insania* – see also *Const*. 18.1 for *insania* and Gaius.
[763] Cf. *ep.* 18.15.

make him unfit for the political task of governing as emperor.[764] Madness, therefore, is intended in a political-moral sense and this makes Gaius' inadequate behaviour even less justifiable. The difference between Seneca's moral point and Suetonius' pathological explanation, however, is subtle and the final portray of Gaius appears, at least on the surface, almost identical.[765] It does not help that there is conspicuous lack of clarity – in all Stoic thinkers – on the distinction between the pathological, moral and abusive meanings of madness. Both Cicero, who is inconsistent in his definitions, and Seneca, who utterly neglects giving definitions, partake in this ambiguity.[766] No wonder that *insania* was (mis-)taken literally as madness by later writers.

The degree of misrepresentation of the events depends on which reconstruction of the facts we are inclined to accept. My preference goes to Winterling's reconstruction of the events. It is simple, logical and removes the problem of finding a justification for a mistake that is hardly justifiable. Regardless of individual opinions, however, a pattern is quite recognizable in the manner Seneca tells stories where Gaius is protagonist. Firstly, he leaves out several details. For sure, his readers were aware of the circumstances and could fill in the gaps. However, because the events are compressed and decontextualized and none of the elements necessary to understand the emperor's motivations are left in

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[764] Schrömbges 1988: 177-78. Moving from slightly different premises, Winterling 2011: 188-89 has suggested that Seneca applied them as terms of abuse.

[765] Suetonius (*Gaius* 50.2 and 55.1) defines Gaius: ***Valitudo ei neque corporis neque animi constitit***. … *Mentis valitudinem et ipse senserat ac subinde de secessu deque purgando cerebro cogitavit. Creditur potionatus a Caesonia uxore amatorio quidem medicamento, sed quod in **furorem** vertit.* ('**He was sound neither of body nor mind**. … He himself realised his **mental infirmity**, and thought at times of going into retirement and clearing his brain. It is thought that his wife Caesonia gave him a drug intended for a love potion, which however had the effect of **driving him mad**.'). *Quorum vero studio teneretur, omnibus ad **insaniam** favit* ('Toward those to whom he was devoted his partiality became **madness**')

[766] From the beginning, the Stoics identified two types of madness, one pathological and another 'general' affecting the whole humankind. Unfortunately, they did not think of marking the distinction lexically (see Ahonen: 103-32, esp. 103-07). Cicero sometimes (*Tusc.* 3.11) distinguishes between *furor* (pathology) and *insania* (general madness) but in other works is less precise (e.g. *Acad.* 2.51). Seneca does not make lexical distinctions (cf. *Ben.* 2.35.2). On *furor and insania* and cognate words in Seneca, see Borgo (without date: 78-81, 99-102 with references).

place, the upshot is a distorted reading of the intentions of Gaius. Secondly, Gaius' extravagances are cherry-picked and, again, decontextualized to create the image of an absolute monster, cruel and unpredictable with almost infinite power. Manipulation there is, even if it is just a consequence of the elaboration of Persian examples as terms of comparison to Gaius' tyrannical attitudes. Thus, if possibly Caligula at Baiae, had *himself* opened the door to the parallel with Xerxes, there is a good probability that Seneca may have added, or at least greatly emphasised the similarities. No reader could fail to interpret the passage in *de Brevitate Vitae* as an episode of *imitatio Xerxis* and the associations between Gaius and the Persian despots are too pervasive across the entire Senecan corpus to allow for a coincidence. The consequence is that, when an association with preceding tyrants is suggested, the dominant note of the story becomes the imitation of the mad kings of the past. Add to this all the other passages that place the Persian tyrants close to Gaius and it may not be surprising that Suetonius would write *aemulatione Xerxis* and Dio that the emperor boasted to have surpassed Darius and Xerxes.

To summarise, Seneca used Persian exempla extensively to emphasise the barbarousness and monstrosity of Gaius' acts. He even engineered historical events in order to obtain this effect. I believe there is enough evidence to suggest that Seneca constructed a specific image of the Persians in order to use it to better define his portrayal of Gaius. The mechanism is clear, in both the episode at Baiae and in the repeated associations of Gaius, Alexander and Persian kings we have seen in *de Ira*.[767] Take an event and deprive it of its context, bring out the element of extravagance and

[767] Another good example are the executions in *de ira* 3.18-19. On Seneca's tendentiousness in this instance see Winterling 2011: 136-38.

emphasise the connections with the morally questionable behaviour by associating it with some example of the past; in the process the subject (Gaius in this instance) acquires other characteristics peculiar to the example chosen. At the end of the process, Gaius resembles a Persian tyrant. But, we said that the Persian tyrant, in the meaning intended by Seneca, viz. the prototype of the bad ruler tyrannical, greedy, arrogant, unrestrained and, above all, cruel is, at least for a good part, a Senecan innovation.[768] There is no contradiction in this. The point is that the process is not unidirectional. Both images are the result of Seneca's elaboration. Once the equation 'Xerxes plus Alexander equals Gaius' had been conceived it was easy for Seneca to emphasise one side or another of the parallel. While Seneca builds an image of Gaius as a monster by associating him with the figure of the ferocious Persian king, he creates a sort of mutual dependence / exchange between the two which affects also the reputation of the Persian king. Seneca sets a trend that will make Gaius the madman in the North and the monster at Rome, to do so he creates an image of the Persian monster.

4. <u>In the wake of Seneca. Quintus Curtius Rufus and Lucan.</u>

While Seneca is the main *artifex* of the connection between the Persian king and contemporary politics, he is not alone in his preoccupation and interest for Persian precedents of autocracy. At least two other authors share his concerns.

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[768] See *supra.* Balsdon (1934: 96-100) spends quite a few pages to suggest that the fame of cruel tyrant of Gaius was 'created' by Seneca.

Curtius

In his work, the *Historiae Alexandrii Magnii*, Curtius describes how Alexander the Great, constantly favoured by fortune, after defeating Darius III, is gradually corrupted and transformed into an oriental despot. It may not be surprising therefore that Darius is despotic, whimsical, arrogant, condescending and effeminate, or that he can turn into a cruel tyrant when he is overwhelmed by anger.[769] Or that Alexander, especially after he has conquered Persia, becomes *superbus* and *iratus* (overbearing and irascible).[770]

Curtius' characters, however, are not as sharply defined as in Seneca.[771] Alexander is prone to anger but can be merciful, respectful of the prisoners and of the royal family. When he undergoes his change, he does not simply become a new Darius. He is clearly something different.[772] Darius III too is not just a savage despot. Curtius defines him as a gentle and mild person.[773] And his most significant feature is not tyranny or cruelty but his lack of ability to be a strong and charismatic leader.

There is a strong narrative logic behind this. The first part of the *Historiae* is constructed around the contrast between Alexander, a man of *vis* ('courage') and of *fortuna* and Darius, an *ignavus* ('coward') and *infelix*, or *infortunatus* king.[774] The comparison is ubiquitous. In battle, despite Darius' good intentions, they behave in

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[769] Anger: 3.2.17, 3.8.15; arrogance: 4.1.1, 3.8.11.
[770] 4.6.29, 6.5.19, 6.7.35, 6.2.1, 6.2.2, 6.6.1-6.
[771] Curtius dedicates several pages to the Persians but very little is original. There are considerations on the immensity of the army and its mixed character (4.12.1-13), on wealth and effeminacy (3.3.1-28), divine nature of the king (6.6.2, 8.5.11), gardens (7.2.22), etc. The only striking detail is that the wife and mother of Darius are the opposite of the cliché of the cruel and intriguing queen (Amestris and Parysatis are the best examples). This does not mean they are less fictional, see Briant 2015: 331.
[772] As it is made clear by the episode in which Alexander lets an exhausted soldier rest on his throne, then he comments that if he had been a Persian king the soldier would have been killed because of that (Curt. 8.4.15-17). Cf. also 10.1.24-26. Anger: 4.6.29 and 8.1.22-52.
[773] 3.2.17, 3.8, 4.16.9, 5.11.
[774] Alexander: 3.4.11, 4.1.40, 4.9.22-23, 8.3.1. Darius: 3.8.2-3, 3.8. 30, 4.16.10, 3.11.23, 5.2.8. Cf. Banyham 1998: 118.

opposite ways. Alexander fights in the midst of the fray with his men, Darius stands on a high chariot or cowardly runs away.[775] Alexander is determined, while Darius is unresolved and ready to compromise. The correspondence between the two kings shows clearly who has the upper hand and Darius' indecisiveness becomes almost parody when he receives the news that his wife has died and is fatal to him when he, offended by Nabarzanes, on the eve of the plot which would bring him to ruin, retires into his tent and leaves the troops in camp without guidance.[776] The logic and the narrative of the first three surviving books seems to move towards a climactic point, namely the death of Darius, and what seems to be a sort of 'un-official' passage of the regal power to Alexander.[777] The last appearances of the Great King on the scene see him resigned and almost eager to pass the sceptre to Alexander.[778] From this point of view the symbolic meaning of the attitude of Alexander towards the women of the court is significant: Sisygambis is treated as a 'mother', daughters and sisters as his own and the young son of Darius a 'son'.[779] This not only a praise of Alexander's continence, it defines his appropriation of the royal family.[780] Finally, to military victory and proper linage, moral superiority should be added. For example, in book three, the episode in which the good

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[775] 3.11.7, 4.1.1-3 and 4.14 and 4.15. Darius' cowardice also: Arr. 2.11.2,4-5 and 3.14.2-3, Just. 11.9.9, Diod. 17.34.6-7.

[776] Correspondence: 4.1.7-14, indecisiveness: 4.10.34, retires in tent: 5.8-12. The speech of Nabarzane (5.9.3-8) seems to suggest that the problem (or the excuse) for Bessus' takeover (and killing of Darius) was Darius' inadequacy as military leader; cf. Baynham 1998: 121.

[777] 5.1.16-38, 5.2.1-13. Although the text breaks off at 5.13.25, it is likely that the two main characters would meet at this point (directly or by proxy) and with them the two main themes of the first five books: *fortuna* (Alexander) and *regnum* (Darius). In Trogus, Darius talks to one of his soldiers and acknowledges the greatness of Alexander. This is very much in tune with the idea of universal history underpinning Trogus' work and the passage of power between rulers and Curtius may have given a similar interpretation of the events; cf. Baynham 1998: 42.

[778] 5.1.4-9, 5.13.25.

[779] Mother: 5.2.19, 3.12.17, 25; daughters and sisters: 3.12.21, 4.11.3; son 3.11.24, 12.2.

[780] Not a peculiarity of Curtius (cf. Diod. 17.37.6 and 17.38.1-3) but this does not detract from the point. On the Persian women captured by Alexander, see Carney 1996 and Briant 2015: 331-34, 338; on continence 4.10.34.

advisor Charidemus is cruelly and whimsically killed by Darius creates a contrast between the *perfidia* of the Persian and the *fides* of Alexander towards his physician.[781] Thus, when the legitimate, but inadequate, king dies and the new king (Bessus) is a usurper and a traitor, Alexander has amply demonstrated to have the right qualities and, by right of conquest, the entitlement to be the new king. Darius himself confirms this.[782] Hitherto Alexander's characterisation has been very close to an ideal model of ruler who is heroic and bold, a *iustus hostis* and *misericors victor* whose charisma and individualism is strong but tempered by the influence of his friends.[783] In the second half of the story, however, the focus shifts to the relationship between the new king and his entourage. After defeating Darius, Alexander adopts habits that corrupt his moral superiority. His military *fortuna* never abandons him, but moral degeneration into tyranny manifests itself as lack of self-restraint, the adoption of the Persian royal apparatus, banquets, degeneration of the relationship with his friends and cruelty.[784]

In short, Curtius makes Darius work as a foil for Alexander with the purpose of emphasising the latter's superior *fortuna,* morality, military ability and right to the throne and to make the subsequent transformation even more significant.[785] Darius' *ira*, along with cowardice and effeminacy – flaws openly censured by Curtius – are instrumental to the building of a the portrayal of an inept king, one who is 'corrupted by *fortuna* and thus

[781] 3.2.10-19 vesrus 3.6.1-20.
[782] 4.10.34: *ne quis potius Asiae rex sit quam iste tam iustus hostis, tam misericors victor.*
[783] It is easy to see the correlations with contemporary policy here, especially in the very idealized vision of how the relationship between the emperor (Alexander) and the senate (friends) should be; cf. Baynham 1998: 164.
[784] Drunkenness: 5.6.10, Persian customs: 6.5.22 and 6.6.8, banquets: 6.2.1, degeneration of the relationship with his 'friends', dissimulation and cruelty: 4.6.29, 8.1.22-52, 8.5.16-81, especially 17-21. Unaffected generalship, cf. 6.6.14, with Briant 2015: 295-96. See also 9.9.1.
[785] Darius is the 'authenticator of Alexander's incomparable virtue' Briant 2015: 337-38.

behaved arrogantly', not an immoral tyrant.[786] This explains why Darius' rage never comes close to the ferocity of Xerxes or the Cambyses of *de Ira.*

Thus, characters are more nuanced than in Seneca but the terms of comparison are the same and even the method of analysis is similar. Curtius produces a piece of 'rhetorical history' told through example and antithesis.[787] More importantly, the fundamental questions raised in the *Historiae* are the same that troubled Seneca. What is the model that a king should follow? What relationship is there between the ruler and those who are close to him? What are the pitfalls into which an all-powerful man could fall? [788] The following questions, then, present themselves. Could the *Historiae* be a sort of manual for an autocrat (as the *Clementia*)? Did Curtius have Gaius in mind?

That the shadow of Gaius and the problem of autocracy loom over the *Historiae* is probably more than plausible.[789] It is certainly correct to interpret the work as an exploration of kingship.[790] However, it is arduous to establish the exact relationship between Seneca and Curtius and the weight of the overlaps and divergencies. Without consistent chunks of the text, without any reliable information on the author and without certainty on the date of composition, definitive conclusions are impossible and suspending the judgment is probably the soundest resolution.[791] However, if we accept, as the majority of scholars do, that the most likely periods for the composition of the

[786] Atkinson 1980: 112.

[787] History as a branch of rhetoric e.g. Cic. *De Or.* 2.15.62-64, cf. Woodman 1988: 197. Curtius' rhetorical training is evident. His models are Livy (first and foremost) but also the schools of rhetoric; see Baynham's 1998: 28 comparing Curtius 9.4.18 with Seneca *Suas.* 1.1 and 15-20.

[788] As for Seneca (and Suetonius), for Curtius *fortuna* and *licentia regni* ('absolute power') corrupt. Cf. Sen. *Polyb.* 7.2, *Clem.* 1.8.5, Suet. *Gaius* 29.

[789] Italo Lana (1949) suggested that the *Historiae* may have been written under Claudius with references to Gaius, a possibility embraced by Atkinson (1980: 38 and 73).

[790] On Curtius and the *regnum* (= authority, sovereignty, power but also tyranny and despotism), cf. Baynham 1998: 216.

[791] On date and identity of Curius, opinions are summarized by Von Albrect, 1997 (vol. 2): 1084n1 and Baynham 1998: 201-19 with more or less possible connections to every emperor.

Historiae are either Claudius' years or under Vespasian, then this work at least testifies to the relevance of the Persian king as model in the Julio-Claudian discourse on kingship. It also shows how problematic it is to disentangle causes from effects once a network of connections (between Alexander, the Persian King and Gaius) has been created.

Lucan

In the epic on the civil war written by Seneca's nephew, the poet Lucan, Persia also has a conspicuous presence.[792] In the split-apart world of the *Bellum Civile*, even the representation of Persia takes sides. Caesar is often compared to Xerxes and other Persian despots. He 'is' Xerxes at Brundisium where, because he cannot accept that his rival should be in control even of a small portion of Italy, he starts building a dam to prevent the departure of Pompey.[793] Ultimately, Caesar's effort turns out to be useless.[794] Thus, he resorts to building a bridge of boats, which is duly compared to the deed of Xerxes and explicitly labelled as an act of excess and megalomania.[795] The passage follows quite closely Caesar's account and is reminiscent of Horace but it is also redolent of many passages from Seneca. In particular, in his absolute restlessness Caesar recalls the prototype of the unwise man described in *de Beneficiis* and exemplified by Alexander, Cyrus, Cambyses and the royal line of Persia.[796]

[792] The short life of Lucan presents several difficulties but at least we are certain about his authorship, date and circumstances of death.
[793] 2.650-79.
[794] 2.663.
[795] *Talis fama canit tumidum super aequora Persen / construxisse uias* (2.672-73, 'Such, by the report of fame, was the road built over the sea by the proud Persian'; Loeb, Duff).
[796] Caes. *BC* 1.25-30. Hor. *Carm.* 3.1.33-37 and 2.18.20-22. *Ben.* 7.2.1-3.2 (note the insistency on *haureo* – 'swallowing' – as a metaphor of unsatisfaction). Caesar's portray at 2.655-656 has also Seneca's Atreus as a model (Fantham 1992: 208 and Narducci 2002: 51-70. See also (Alexander) *tumidissimum animal,* Sen. *Ben.* 2.16.2.

In Spain, Caesar has another violent encounter with nature when, in a manner that is reminiscent of Cyrus' behaviour, he exacts vengeance on a river.[797] Then for the third time, he is equated to a Persian king in the sixth book.[798] At Darrichyum he builds a wall to encircle the camp of Pompey which surpasses in size the walls of Troy, the circular walls of Babylon and encloses a surface as big as the space between the Tigris and the Orontes. Lucan comments that this was a pointless effort and the work necessary to build it would have been better employed to build the bridge of boats over the Hellespont, or to cut of the isthmus of Corinth (all acts notoriously pointless and abominable).

> *tanti periere labores.*
>
> *tot potuere manus aut iungere Seston Abydo*
>
> *ingestoque solo Phrixeum elidere pontum,*
>
> *Bellum Ciuile* 6.54-57

> But all that labour was wasted. Such an army of busy hands might have joined Sestos to Abydos, piling up soil till the sea of Phrixus was forced from its place;

Finally, in the tenth book, after a banquet following his first night with Cleopatra, Caesar discusses with an old priest Acoreus the geography of Egypt and in particular the sources

[797] 4.141-143. Cf. Caes. *BC* 1.61-2; on Cyrus and the Gyndes: Hdt. 1.189, Sen. *Ira* 3.20.1-21.4. After Brundisium Caesar disrupts nature also at 3.349-452, 3.453-762 and 3.681-690.

[798] 6.48-63.

of the Nile. The old man compares Caesar's unrestrained desire for knowledge to that of three archetypal tyrants: Alexander, Cambyses and Sesostris.[799]

The terms of comparison in all these instances are Alexander and the Persian kings and the common denominator is disrespect for nature and its limits and the size of their work. If Alexander is the first point of reference for the madman, the ferocious general and the trespasser of natural boundaries, Xerxes is the second and shares with Cesar megalomania, arrogance and a propensity for destruction of natural landscape.[800] The Persian king is a symbol of the enormity, excessiveness and ultimately pointlessness of tyrannical aspirations.

Pompey, by contrast, has a special relationship with the Parthians. In the second book, in search of allies against Caesar, he plans to rouse Parthia.[801] Unsuccessful in his first attempt, he tries again after Pharsalus by sending Deiotarus.[802] Finally, in search of a safe heaven, he suggests seeking refuge in Parthia where—he hopes—he could win the king over to his cause and return with an army.[803] This prompts a rebuttal from his general, Lentulus, who points out the inappropriateness of this plan by remarking that the Parthians are the unavenged winner of Crassus, are adept at lust and extremely remote barbarians, represent the enemy and 'the other' and are almost *aliter mundi.*

These associations have an important function within the logic of the poem. Pompey's drifting towards the Eastern edges of the empire and his attempts to draw the

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[799] 10.279-82. Cf. Tac. *Ann.* 14.16. The positive implications of the pursuit of knowledge are undercut by its association with *cupiditas* to reach the limits of the world (10.268-269). Acoreus corresponds to the model for the wise man (8.476). On the passage and Senecan themes, see Manolaraki 2011. Berti 2000: *ad loc.,* suggests the derivation of the theme form Sen. *de Ira* 3.25. The parallel Caesar – Alexander is explicit also at 10.19.

[800] On Alexander, see *BC* 10.19-52 with Ahl 1976: 222-30.

[801] *Euphraten Nilumque move*, 2.633.

[802] 8.211-38.

[803] Pompey's speech: 8.262-327, Lentulus' reply: 8.331-453.

Parthians into the conflict become a symbol of his loss of Roman values.[804] Similarly, the association of Caesar with the Persian kings and Alexander the Great emphasises his tyrannical attitude and distance from the Roman ideal.[805] Loss of identity is a major theme of the poem, it transcends the individuals and acquires universal and even cosmic proportions. Reversal of values and the breaking apart of the very foundation of the state, are singled out from the beginning among the causes and symptoms of the civil war.[806] Combined, they lead to the implosion of Rome, displace her from her position in the world, in the universe and change her nature for good (= loss of identity).[807]

If Lucan makes an original use of material, however, he draws it from pre-existing sources. The failure to be at the centre of an *imperium sine fine,* like many other themes, derives from Virgil.[808] The importance of the failure to conquer Parthia in creating a tyrannical regime is an elaboration of Horatian themes.[809] The figures of Xerxes and Alexander, the prototypes of tyranny, excess and boundary crossing, are permeated by Senecan influence.[810] Seneca distinguishes between Achaemenids and Parthians, so does

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[804] Saylor 1979: 243-57 on the meaning of movements outwards and inwards in the poem. See also my contribution to Thorne and Zientek, forthcoming.

[805] Ahl 1976: 230.

[806] 1.2-4.

[807] Implosion: *BC* 1.65-85; 72: *nec se Roma ferens* ('Rome unable to support her own weight'). See Hor. *Carm*. 2.1, *Epod*. 7 and 16. For Narducci the idea informs the entire section 1.65-85. On Lucan, Rome and the dissolution of the world, see Narducci 2002: 18-41, Narducci 2004. On natural and human confusion and their consequences (social but also stylistic), see Bramble 1982. On the laws of Rome nullified by the onslaught of war, 1.176-177. On Rome's loss of centrality after Pharsalus, Bexley 2009: 475, also Fratantuono 2012: 323 -24, Ahl 1976: 170. On Rome losing her chance to become (or be) one thing with the world, Gagliardi 2001: 165-82.

[808] On the *Bellum Ciuile* and the Aeneid see Casali 2011, Tarrant 1997: 67, Narducci 1979, for more bibliography, see Roche 2009: 21n39.

[809] Groß 2013: 95-101. A list of parallels (for book 1) in Roche (2009: 24-25 and 114). See also my contribution to Thorne and Zientek, forthcoming.

[810] On boundary violation in Seneca, see Segal 2008, in Lucan, see Masters 1992: 64, Bartsch 1997: 14-48, O'Gorman 1995: 122. Lucan's *Bellum Ciuile* has an extensive debt to Seneca which, Narducci (2002: 42-70) suggests, goes beyond the use of the same sources or common rhetorical education.

Lucan.[811] Seneca's Parthians which appear frequently in lists of exotic and far-flung lands, are described as barbarian, king-ruled archers-horsemen living in an isolated territory beyond the Euphrates and enclosed between the alien Scythia and the Persian Gulf. For Lucan they are this and more: another world.[812] Seneca's Achaemenid kings and Xerxes in the *Bellum Ciuile* are absolute kings, autocratic, overbearing, harmful and destructive.

Seneca had adapted the cliché of the Persian king to his own ends. Lucan picked up the modified model, complemented his uncle's pessimism with his total hopelessness and applied it to Caesar. True, direct comparison with grisly episodes of Persian cruelty are absent. However, Caesar's own brutality manifests in different ways. Through clemency, for example, as when he denies Domitius a Roman death.[813] In mass murder and angry impiety.[814] Or in his attitude towards Rome, Massilia and against nature.[815] More importantly, Caesar does not just share in the rage, madness and fury of the tyrants but he takes them to a whole new level and, even worse, he actively spreads these vices.[816] The tyrannical ambitions of Caesar – the marker of his un-Romanness – are one of the driving factors that unleash *furor* and *nefas* which in turn provoke an uncountable number of gruesome deaths.[817] In Lucan's poem tyranny, ferocity and excess transcend the individual and become 'system'.[818] Seneca had adapted the image of the Persian king so that it could be a model for Gaius. The monstrosity of Caesar may differ in the way it

[811] In Seneca, the Persian kings appear only in the philosophical treatises, the Parthians are mentioned mainly in the tragedies.
[812] *Med.* 710, *Pha.* 816, *Oed.* 119, *Thy.* 304, 462 and 603, *HO* 161, *Phoen.* 428, *Oct.* 628. On lists of lands in Seneca and remote geographical areas, see Cattin 1963: 685-87 and Grant 2000. On lists in general see Purcell 1990, Beard 2003: 35-37 and Edwards 2003: 64-66.
[813] 2.499-521.
[814] 7.781-824.
[815] 3.303-04 *furorem indomitum*; 3.356-57 *ira*.
[816] 7.545-596 esp. 7.551 (*hic furor, hic rabies, hic sunt tua crimina, Caesar)* and 7.557-559.
[817] E.g. 3.583-751. On *furor and nefas*: *BC* 1.1-8.
[818] *Cum domino pax ista venit* 1.670-72.

manifests itself but not in its essence, it is informed by madness, cruelty and megalomania and one of the common denominators is being Xerxes-like.

In conclusion, Seneca, Lucan and possibly Curtius represent the same concern for role of the emperor, the compatibility of autocracy and Roman mores and what is a good ruler.[819] They also define the terms of comparison, who the positive and the negative examples are. They all, with obvious individual variations, adopt the same models, Persian Kings and Alexander. This represents the moment of glory (so to speak) for the Persian king in Roman culture; since the victory of Alexander he had never been so popular. The choice of the models may not be entirely original. Rhetorical education may have set the trend and exploited some *topoi* but it is Seneca who transformed the Persian king into a model and used it in his exploration of the ethics of kingship and meditation on tyranny. Building up on one of the most rooted fears whipped up by the social unrest of the Republic and the inception of the principate – the accumulation of power in the hands of a single individual – Seneca created a memorable, coherent and original image of the Persian ruler as a tyrant-monster representing the anxieties of his generation and which would survive embedded in the representation of the deranged emperor Gaius.

[819] Roller (2001: 17-126) reads Seneca and Lucan's works as a response to the creation of the *principate* and as elaborating a new ethical model for the aristocracy which would allow them to navigate the new social and political environment.

CONCLUSIONS

As set out in the introduction I have searched for appropriation of 'ideas and associations revolving around Persia'. In this quest, the starting point has been the cultural memory of Persia elaborated in Athens in the fourth century and in the Hellenistic world in the aftermaths of the expedition of Alexander the Great. Then, the process of appropriation of these memories in Roman culture has been followed and contextualised through a variety of sources. The works of Polybius, Lycophron, Alcaeus of Messene, Livy, Plautus, Ennius, authors of various origin, period and provenience have been scrutinised in order to establish if a case for appropriation of Persian memories could be made for the years of the first Roman expansion in the East, in the first half of the second century BCE . Information from coinage, artworks, monuments and written sources (usually produced by the winners) have been combined to in order to reconstruct how, between 120 and 63 BCE, Mithridates built his image as the heir of Persian and Greek heritage and how his Roman adversaries reacted to it. Passages from Plutarch, Nepos, Cicero, Pliny the Elder and Varro have been analysed in order to reconstruct how, in the years between 70 and 63 BCE, the idea of Persia as an exotic, wealthy and barbarous land had been used in the strategy implemented by Pompey to remove his political enemy Lucullus. Diverse sources such as the remains of the Actian memorial and the decorative sculptures of the temple of Apollo Sosianus at Rome, the layout and decoration of the majestic Forum of Augustus, images on coins and seals and the small circular temple of Rome and Augustus have been analysed along with passages from Horace's Carmina, the Georgics, the Aeneid, Ovid and the accounts of Dio Cassius, Strabo and Pompeius Trogus in order to single out the forces behind the appropriation

of the Athenian memory of the Persian Wars, and its relation with the Parthian settlements, during and after the years of the civil wars between Octavian and Antony, and the following Augustan normalisation. The final chapter focussed on the works of the early imperial writers Seneca the Elder, Valerius Maximus, Curtius Rufus, Lucan and, to a greater degree, on Seneca the Younger and his exploration of autocracy.

This material has been approached chronologically because with so great a variety of sources, spread along such a long span of time it would not otherwise have been possible not to lose perspective of how ideas are modified through their interaction with the context and of how cultural memory are altered by the acquisition of new ideas. As mentioned in the introduction, this is the main fault of existing literature on the subject. The works of Rosivach, Spawforth, Hardie, Schneider, Seager, which I have repeatedly quoted, shaded light on important aspects of the issue. However, they focussed either on individual themes or on a specific discipline (Spawforth and Hardy discussed the Persian Wars, Rosivach the Hellespont in rhetorical training, Schneider some Augustan monuments, other – such as Seager and Paratore – emphasised the assimilation between Parthia and Persia). A different, more comprehensive, perspective was much needed.[820]

Chronological approach has limitations. The most relevant is the risk to underplay the differences between topics that are relevant and those which are less, and lose track of patterns of development. The problem inherent to the nature of the chronological model is offset in this research by the character of the object of inquiry: appropriation. In the introduction I have defined it as the most significant form of

[820] A great deal of scholarship has already been produced in recent years, on the second century BCE and successive periods. Canepa 2011, Bowersock 1969, Swain 1996, Whitmarsh 2001.

interaction between text and context because it implies the highest level of integration of ideas within the cultural memory of the receiving culture. I have defined its deep connection with the context, reception studies, communication theory, cultural memory and identity. I have also mentioned that the process of appropriation is a fluid one (that is, the meaning of ideas changes in relation to the context and through the process). By combining these two elements I could focus on the network of connections that produced appropriation rather than on the succession of events or the evolution of concepts.

The first important conclusion of this research is that not all references to Achaemenid Persia include appropriation. This is the case of the most famous of the Persian stories, Xerxes' crossing of the Hellespont. Between 205 BCE and the end of the first century CE references to this event occur throughout Roman literature. Some authors just unimaginatively repeated it, other, because the story came with a moral teaching attached, used it to support their own moral agenda. None of them, however, with the important exception of the younger Seneca, used it to inform the reader of something he/she did not already know or to elaborate on the moral content it implied. It is a popular story but it implications are predetermined. It is a catchphrase or a proverb, not a cultural memory.

The second relevant aspect emerging from this thesis concerns the relationship between the Greek and Roman memory of Persia and the motivations that prompted their adaptation and assimilation. The experience of the Persian Wars, Athenian imperial aspirations and international decadence shaped the perception of Persia in the Greek mind. The conquests of Alexander and the power struggle following his premature death broke down the boundaries of the world. While Athens, for her part,

remained loyal to her ideological construct of a glorious past, at the beginning of the first century BCE, the resurgence of local potentates within the Hellenised areas of Asia, which took inspiration in the experience of the Achaemenids and in the post-Alexandrian legacy, supplied an alternative model for dealing with this aspect of the past. On her arrival in the eastern Mediterranean, Rome was forced to contend with the weight of this heritage and with unfaltering determination appropriated it. There was no specific interest in Persia. The Romans were compelled to deal with her memory because it was a strong ideological construct that caused resistance because it bolstered local identities. They found it and they dealt with it.

The third, and more important, conclusion is it that the acquisition of Persian memories in Roman culture was a fundamental component of several political, historical and cultural processes. Three occurrences of appropriation, reuse and consequent modifications of Persian memories have been outlined.

First, the Achaemenid memories revived by Mithridates were captured (both literally and metaphorically) by Lucullus and Pompey. The dazzling spectacle of extravagant objects, sensational conquests, the memory of Alexander's deeds, intermingled with the impact of exoticism and power evocated by Persia allowed the Roman people to visualise the amplitude of Rome's *imperium* and confirmed that the threat of Mithridates was over, once and for all. In the process, the Near-Eastern memory of Achaemenid Persia was transformed from a foreign memory of past glory, might and integration between Greek and Persian heritage, into a Roman memory of triumph and victory over external enemies and internal political adversaries.

Under Augustus, it was the turn of the Athenian reinterpretation of the Persian Wars to be appropriated and blended in the new universal order established by Rome

lead by her princeps. One of the main claims of the Augustan normalization was that the heritage of Greece and the East meet at Rome, the guarantor of universal pace and prosperity. The (mainly) Athenian myth of the long-gone glory of the Persian Wars was based on division and opposition between East and West and had proved to be a source of inspiration for all sort of unrest. As part of the process of normalisation, the evocative power of this myth was peacefully but firmly attenuated through a process involving the incorporation into a newly created Roman myth: the myth of a universal principate. In this context the supposed assimilation between Parthians and Persians acquired a new perspective. It is a simple association based on geographical coincidence rather than appropriation.

Under the Julio-Claudians it is the model of Persian kingship that is re-elaborated as part of the investigation of power, kingship and freedom and in the mechanism of power relations within the autocracy. Seneca picks up the motive of the oriental despot ruling over a population composed of slaves and transforms the Persian king into a Roman tyrant. As a result, Cambyses and Xerxes lose part of their Persian (and Greek) character and acquire the features of a despot who embodies the Roman perception of tyranny. In other words, by incorporating Roman anxieties they become, to some extent, Roman.

Not enough stress can be placed on the importance of the context in the process of appropriation. In the late Republic the most important events are expansion and consolidation and extremely heated internal rivalry. The elaboration of Persian memories fits seamlessly within this context. Then, there is the transformation of the Republic into the principate, a political and social change of enormous scope. Only by taking the inception of the new regime into account, with all the subtle ideological and

political manoeuvring that accompanied it, the relevance of the revival of the Persian Wars can be appreciated in its complexity. Finally, without giving the correct importance to the biography of the protagonists (Gaius and the younger Seneca) and the uncertainties and anxiety that the establishing of the imperial system brought about, the figure of the Persian ruler as a yardstick against which to gauge the tyranny of the emperor cannot be perceived.

The relevance of the socio-political context becomes all the more evident if we look at the afterlife of the themes discussed. Concerns with provincial stability, the relation with foreign peoples and the dangers caused by the concentration of power will be a vexing issue for a long time, well after the death of Gaius and Seneca. The terms of comparison, however, will not. Just a few years after the death of Nero, Pliny the Elder would show concerns similar to those of the younger Seneca about tyranny. He would mention Persian wealth. He would also describe the geography of Parthia, which he straightforwardly identifies with Persia, probably prompted, again, by merely geographical considerations, and acknowledge that the subjects of the Parthian King are slaves.[821] But he would not give much space to Achaemenid kings and, crucially, to comparison with contemporary rulers. Similarly, his Alexander is a positive character, eager for knowledge and a sponsor of intellectuals (the opposite of the Alexander of Seneca and Lucan).[822] Tacitus supplies another good example. He may have alluded to Aeschylus' *Persae* and to Xerxes in the *Annale*s when he described the defeat of

[821] *NH* 6.111-126. See Lerouge 219-38 for a discussion of the long passage.

[822] On similarities and differences between Seneca and Pliny, especially on the role of the ruler see Citroni-Marchetti 1991: 170-73 (comparing seafaring in *NQ* and *Medea* with Pliny *NH.* 2.117, 14.1 and 27.3) and Citroni-Marchetti 1991: 175-86 (on the anxieties of Pliny for tyranny, criticism of Julio-Claudians and degeneration of Roman *mores*). On Alexander, Citroni-Marchetti 2011: 18.

Paetus.[823] But there is little Achaemenid Persia in his analysis of tyranny, in spite of the fact that transgressions, crossing of boundaries, barbarization of rulers and court intrigues there are aplenty (especially in the *Annals*), and that he dedicates abrasive pages to at least one cruel tyrant, Tiberius.[824]

The political and historical context had changed. Already after Nero emperors had (or were perceived as having) less inward focus on political informers, palace conspiracies and treason trials. Then came the institutionalisation of the imperial system. This does not mean that autocracy had been completely accepted and digested, but only that it was conceived as a possibility and accepted as a reality. Pliny may lambaste the spread of luxury and the decadence that, in his opinion, it brings about, but he is a supporter of imperial rule.[825] Tacitus, the great inquisitor of the defects of Roman emperors, despite his frequent bemoaning the imperial system, does not question autocracy, or try to define an ethic framework within which to set it in the way the intellectuals living under the Julio-Claudians had done. He may be 'harsh and malicious' towards the principate, but he accepts its inevitability and has a favourable opinion of Trajan.[826] He criticises the servility and *dissimulatio* that the concomitant presence of an all-powerful ruler and Republican institutions fostered, but his main interest is in power and its effects on those who wield it.[827] If autocracy as a concept is not criticised, or your emperor dons the robe of Alexander and perhaps even sets out

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[823] *Ann.* 15.14-16.

[824] Close relationship between Seneca (especially his tragedies) and Tacitus has been noted especially in his characterization of the Roman emperor as an autocrat. However, Tacitus never mentions either the Persian kings or Alexander as a term of comparison. Seneca, Tacitus and transgressions: Santoro-L'Hoir 2006: 200-04, 204-20, 246-48; Nero's barbarian behaviour: Woodman 1998: 171-79. The only character compared with Alexander is Germanicus (*Ann.* 2.73). Unfortunately, the books on Gaius have not survived. On Tiberius, cf. Griffin 1994.

[825] Citroni-Marchetti 1991: 15-21, 176-79.

[826] *Dialogus* 36-41 (esp. 37.8-41), *Ann.* 3.28.2-3. Quote from Syme 1958 (vol. 1): 420.

[827] *Hist.* 1.1, *Ann.* 1.7.1, 14.49.1; *Ann.* 1.1.1, 1.2.1, 1.13.5, etc., see Percival 1980, Griffin 1994.

on an epic campaign in Mesopotamia, there is little room for bad Alexanders and Persian despots as terms of comparison for good and bad rulers.[828] The real issues are now the management and redistribution of power in this new system. As for the risks brought forth by the accession of an inept absolute ruler, they are apparent, one just needs to remember Gaius. No need to exhume Achaemenid rulers to make a point, whatever ideas they may bring to the table it is already embedded in the bad (mad) emperor.

It is therefore evident why, although rigid divisions often do not reflect the complexity of historical progression, in this instance the periodisation proposed, corresponding, as it is, to the main social, institutional and political developments of Rome is fitting. As it has become clear, the perception of Persia closely reflects the evolution of the power dynamic of Roman policy. It is no coincidence, and of the utmost significance, that stories involving the Persians and their kings became popular in the period of the rise of the warlords, that they were variously re-elaborated in the years in which Rome was becoming used to autocracy and then used retrospectively to interpret the events of the late Republican period. It is similarly significant that, when political conditions changed, they fell out of fashion.

This correspondence between the evolution of the perception of Persia and the evolution of the power dynamics of Roman policy is probably the most relevant (if, perhaps, rather unsurprising) aspect and most significant contribution to the scholarly debate brought forth by this exploration. It is apparent that the Roman interest in Persia was certainly not prompted by any historical curiosity and that there was limited interest in recycling an old model in order to place themselves within the Athenian cultural

[828] Vespasian and Trajan both had an 'Alexandrian' side.

tradition. The driving forces of appropriation were socio-cultural and, more importantly, related to expansion and control. Imperialistic aspirations and internal tensions (whether competition between members of the Republican aristocracy, friction between the emperor and his entourage, or politico-social transformations) played an essential role in prompting the Romans to adapt and re-invent what they learnt about Persia. The Roman perception of Persia is affected by political and social changes. It is not a literary phenomenon it is a cultural phenomenon rooted in political history.

For this reason this research ends with the end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, only glimpses at the Flavians and does not venture to explore the possible repercussions of the decadence of Parthia, the rise of the Iranian dynasty of the Sasanians or the revitalisation of Greek identity and its relationship with Rome and her identity in the second and beginning of the third century CE.

In conclusion, the Roman reworking of Persian memories produced an extremely sophisticated elaboration of an already complex tradition which is in turn inextricably integrated into a complex network of ideas rooted in Roman self-consciousness and pursuit of individual and collective power. In each end every instance, perhaps only for a short period (the relative shortness of time in which each one of these networks of meaning was significant does not detract from their significance, memories are hardly ever definitive but can be surprisingly resilient) through the addition of new contexts and the conjuring up of new interpretations, the Achaemenid (fictional) legacy became part of the Roman culture.

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